

Russian Life



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APRIL 2010

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A city turns 1000

Afghan War

Russia returns

Kremlin Secrets

Digging for answers

RNO at 20

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SOME OF THE AUTHORS PUBLISHED SO FAR IN CHTENIA

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From Russian Life BOOKS

The Little Golden Calf

Ilya Ilf & Evgeny Petrov

This new edition of *The Little Golden Calf*, one of the greatest Russian satires, is the first English translation of this classic novel in nearly 50 years. It is also the first unabridged, uncensored English translation ever, and includes an introduction by Alexandra Ilf, daughter of one of the book's two co-authors.



The novel resurrects the con man Ostap Bender, "the smooth operator," and follows him and his three hapless co-conspirators on a hilarious romp through the Soviet Russia and Central Asia of 1930.

"A grand satirical novel... There is more of Russia in this book than in a dozen treatises by foreigners."

— *New York Times* (1932)

So many quotations from this novel have entered everyday Russian speech that it stands alongside the works of Griboyedov, Pushkin, and Gogol for its profound effect on Russian language and culture. The tale overflows with legendary literary episodes, offering a portrait of Russian life that is as funny and true today as it was when the novel was first published.

For decades, foreigners trying to understand Russia have been advised to read the adventures of Ostap Bender. This fresh new translation by Anne O. Fisher makes them more enjoyable than ever.

"Bravo for Anne O. Fisher for her wonderful annotated translation of Ilf's and Petrov's hilarious road novel... Russian Life books has done a very nice job of producing the volume, which will prove enormously useful in classes in Russian History and Literature."

— Professor Jeffrey Brooks, The Johns Hopkins University

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The authors included in this fine collection are: Vladimir Voinovich, Andrey Gelasimov, Boris Grebenshchikov, Yevgeny Grishkovets, Victor Yerofoev, Alexander Kabakov, Eduard Limonov, Dmitry Lipskerov, Sergey Lukyanenko, Vladimir Makanin, Marina Moskva, Victor Pelevin, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Zakhar Prilepin, Dina Rubina, Dunya Smirnova, Vladimir Sorokin, Alexander Khurgin and Leonid Yuzefovich.

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and *Promised Land: Thirteen Books*
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Russian Life

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features

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It is not often a world city celebrates its millennial birthday, but this year that honor falls to one of Russia's most ancient and multi-faceted urban centers, Yaroslavl.

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The fiercely independent Russian National Orchestra, the finest of Russian classical ensembles, turns 20 this year. We look at how they have flourished against all odds.

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Hundreds of layers of history lie buried beneath the cobblestones and brick walls of Moscow's Kremlin. But accessing them requires negotiating with the current residents of the crenellated fortress.

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Russia and Latvia have a long and complicated history, one which is vividly reflected in the politics, society and architecture of Riga, a beautiful medieval city on the Baltic coast.



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Photo: © David A. Smith
by Andrew Chasovnikov

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EXACTLY 20 YEARS AGO, on March 11, 1990, in a crumbling hi-rise apartment block about a 30-minute drive from the Kremlin, myself and another American expat, David Kelley, officially founded this company. I seem to recall that we toasted the occasion with bottles of Heineken and that Bruce Hornsby's *The Valley Road* was playing on a portable CD player.

Hardly an auspicious or glamorous beginning. But two decades on, after weathering coup attempts, economic crises, numerous office moves and two name changes (from Russian River Trading Company to Soviet Information Services, finally to settle on Russian Information Services), we are still plunking along (David has since semi-retired to a horse ranch out west).

We began with the intent of publishing books and maps for business travelers to Russia. By 1993, we had branched out into newsletters (on travel and business) and a mail order book catalog. And then, in 1995, we purchased *Russian Life*, the successor publication to *Soviet Life*. Since then, the magazine has increasingly become the center of our business, yet that has not stopped additional branching out (it may even have encouraged it), into calendars, festivals, vodka taste-offs and now fiction.

Through it all, I have had the honor of working with some great staff, gotten to know hundreds of really talented freelance authors, illustrators and photographers, and had the privilege of sharing my passion for all things Russian with tens of thousands of customers who are also Russophiles. Thank you all!

Yet a special thanks is due to Professor Malcolm Gilbert, who first ignited my passion for Russia, setting in motion the events that led to this company's founding and this magazine's publication. So it is very appropriate that he agreed to write the Post Script column for this issue, and doubly so given his intimate knowledge of, and frequent visits to, Russia over the last four decades. *Na zdorovye*, Malcolm!



FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, in the sixth issue of *Russian Life* we published, our cover story was on an up-and-coming private Russian orchestra that was taking the world by storm. Today, the Russian National Orchestra is widely recognized as one of the best in the world. And so we return to feature them in considerably greater depth, on the occasion of their 20th anniversary this year. I mention this by way of full disclosure, for it has been our pleasure and honor over the past 10 years

to provide tour, publication, website and fulfillment support services to the RNO via the Russian Arts Foundation.

Meanwhile, we also offer four other features in this packed issue, from a timely look at Russian involvement in Afghanistan, to pieces on 1000-year-old Yaroslavl and slightly younger Riga, to a story on what archaeologists have been digging up beneath the Moscow Kremlin.

Enjoy the issue, share it with a friend (they can also request their own free sample issue online), and thanks for riding with us for part of this journey.

Here's to the next 20 years!

Paul E. Richardson
Publisher

STOP PRESS! At press time, we learned that the *Russky Mir* Foundation will again support our schools program, including the *Uchites* language insert in *Russian Life* and free distribution of issues to participating schools and universities. The program will be renamed "Language Through Culture" and restart in the fall. Further, also with *Russky Mir* support, we will publish a special bilingual issue of *Chitena* this fall.

Russian Life

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Russian Life is a bimonthly magazine covering Russian culture, history, society and geography. The intent of *Russian Life* is to offer an objective, insightful trip into the heart of Russian reality. *Russian Life* is a magazine of ideas and a forum for discussion. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, management or advisory board of *Russian Life* magazine.

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To the Editors:

During this last year, I have been reading *Russian Life*. It had been given to me by my son for Christmas and I enjoyed it very much. Hopefully he will give it to me again this Christmas.

In the last issue (Nov/Dec 2009) I have been wondering about your translation of the word **МУЖИК** (*Marital Squabbles*, Survival Russian, page 30, which is very amusing and probably true). **МУЖИК** is a "peasant"; a man is a **МУЖЧИНА**. In American English, I think, you do not use the word peasant, but say "farmer," [but] the dialog would sound awkward if you would have written... "You are not a farmer [peasant] but a rag..."

Perhaps it became a Soviet way of using **МУЖИК** for **МУЖЧИНА**. But now it would be time to reverse

things like that, because a **МУЖИК** is a man, but a man need not be **МУЖИК**.

Thank you again for a lovely magazine.

Kindest regards,

Mrs. M. Brandt
Strathfield, Australia

Ms. Brandt:

You summarize it well in your last statement. МУЖИК is a particularly rich Russian word, and can be used to mean man, peasant, prisoner, husband, boor, and sometimes even a combination of one or more of the above, depending upon the context!

— The Editors

To the Editors:

I'm a forever subscriber to *Russian Life*, way back into *Soviet Life* days, and think it now to be an absolute-

ly wonderful publication. Our ASU Russian language program is one of the Russkiy Mir beneficiaries, being given 150 free subscriptions this year for our students.

Every issue is a treasure, and the articles therein are always exemplary and fascinating. But your article on "Tolstoy's Taking Sides" in this latest Jan/Feb 2010 issue is just superb... a masterpiece in my opinion, ranking with some of the best I've read there (e.g. Fyodor "The American" Tolstoy and "The First Ambassador," on John Quincy Adams). It's fascinating for the layman and specialist alike, with acute narration and truly great photo accompaniment. There is a revelation or more on every page. Thanks for this wonderful work.

Lee Croft
Tempe, AZ

Letters may be edited for grammar, spelling and to fit the space available. The best way to write us is by email. See the editorial box on the preceding page for our email address.

Places mentioned in this issue

VIAZNIKI This 402-year-old town of 40,000 on the river Klyazma (and about 110 km from Vladimir) is off the main rail lines, but has long been an icon-painting center (and more recently home to linen-factories). Artists from here were summoned to paint Kremlin cathedrals in the 1600s. Since 1622, the town has been a pilgrimage site, as its Blagoveshchensky Monastery houses a miracle-working icon of Our Lady of Kazan.



Ilya Ovchinnikov (Russian National Orchestra, page 42) is a graduate of Moscow State University and did graduate work at the Institute for Russian History at the Russian Academy of Sciences, researching nihilism in the late 19th century. For a decade, he was managing editor of *Russky Zhurnal* (russ.ru). He has been a music critic since 2002 and regularly writes for various Moscow newspapers. He is presently working on a book on musical life in Moscow in the 1960s and 1970s. He is a frequent contributor to *Russian Life*.

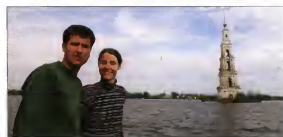


Alexander Mozhayev (Kremlin Secrets, page 50) is a graduate of the Moscow Architectural Institute, with a specialty in architectural restoration. Since 2002, he has worked as a journalist for various Moscow magazines, and as an author of Moscow guidebooks. He is a member of the organization, Moscow That Is No More, which works to halt destruction of the capital's architectural heritage, and is actively involved in the restorationist website, archnadzor.ru. He is a frequent contributor to *Russian Life*, most recently with an article on Zaryade, in our May/June 2009 issue.

Nick Allen (Afghanistan, page 36) is a Russian studies graduate of the University of Bath, England, and worked as a journalist in Russia from 1996 to 2006 for The *Moscow Times* newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph* and the German Press Agency dpa. He went on to work for dpa in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he recently completed a two-year book project on the current conflict. He also translates, having rendered in English Russian conscript Arkady Babchenko's autobiographical work *One Soldier's War in Chechnya*.



Alina Lisina (Riga, page 56) is Russian but was born and raised in Riga and completed her education at the University of Latvia. She is a staff writer for the weekly Russian language newspaper *Subbota* and loves travelling the world and writing on different places and cultures. Alina won a Reuters journalism award in 2008 for her article about an HIV infected person living in Latvia.



George and Maria Shpikalov (Yaroslavl, page 28) enjoy driving around Russia and capturing beautiful images. In 2006, they traveled by car from the Barents to the Black Sea, camping, exploring and recording their impressions in words and photographs, which were published as *Russia: North to South* in 2007. The next year found the couple in Yaroslavl, working on the special anniversary edition of a photo album *Yaroslavl: 1000 Years of History and Culture*. The book was published this year. George's photography was featured in the 2010 *Russian Life* Wall Calendar, "Russian Waters." Both George and Maria are graduates of Moscow State University's journalism faculty.

Sochi's Gamble

Olympic construction battles nature and time.

AS THE CLOCK TICKS LOUDER and the 2014 Sochi Olympics inch nearer, nature seems to be laughing at the prospect of a winter games in Russia's southernmost mountainous region. On January 31, as Canada was days away from its Vancouver games, Sochi's temperature hit 18.9° C (66° F), breaking the historical record for that date.

The region's subtropical climate had given the International Olympic Committee pause when considering Sochi. But at the crucial May 2007 final presentations in Guatemala, then-President Vladimir Putin defended the city, personally assuring the jury that he had skied the slopes of Sochi's Krasnaya Polyana just a week before.

Over the holidays this year, Putin and current President Dmitry Medvedev posed for pictures aboard a ski lift, holding government meetings in between runs down the slopes.

"We have no worries. Construction goes according to schedule, but still we constantly tell the organizers: don't waste time!" said Jacques Rogge, president of the IOC in an interview with *Vedomosti*.

That a crucial part of the infrastructure was hit by a natural disaster did not help. A cargo port developed by Oleg Denpaska's company, Basic Element, was deluged by a storm that damaged piers, submersed equipment and killed four persons. The port, which has a planned capacity of five million tons per year, must be finished by the end of 2010 in order to receive construction materials for the sports arenas, according to an info sheet near the construction site. Basic Element said the port will be finished by December, but no activity was observed during a recent visit to the site.

Another key infrastructure project – the road from Sochi airport in Adler to the mountain venues – was severely damaged by a flood in early January. Bloggers posted photographs of submerged and disfigured equipment which construction workers had parked near the banks of the Mzymta River. The Mzymta has suffered colossal damage from the construction, including thousands of tons of illegal gravel extraction. Local environmentalists and experts have cautioned leaders about the region's difficult geological and weather conditions, which, in the absence of proper research, could precipitate further disasters. But with so much work to complete on so many greenfield



HEADS OF STATE
President Dmitry Medvedev (left) and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin confer between ski runs at Sochi's Krasnaya Polyana resort in January. The city faces huge obstacles to finishing construction and renovation before it hosts the 2014 Winter Olympic Games.

construction projects, there is little time for researching the impact of Olympic development.

Medvedev, who held a special meeting on Olympic readiness during his vacation in January, said he was confident that everything will be finished on time. Priorities for the government, he said, are finishing the sports facilities, modernizing the hotel and transportation infrastructure, and sorting out conflicts with local residents to be displaced by new construction.

Clearly 2010 will be a critical year for companies participating in Olympic construction. Russian Railways has twice the volume of Olympic work on its agenda versus 2009. The regional government must complete the seizure of private property under eminent domain. And the president of the state corporation Olimpstroy, Taimuraz Bolloyev, said his company must complete 30 Olympic structures, which will this year require the hiring of 30,000 laborers.

All Olympic construction must be finished by July 2013. Yet some ski championships are scheduled here for late 2012, offering the region a practice run for the big event.

SOCHI is actually a municipal "agglomeration" that occupies some 3506 km² and stretches 145 km along the Black Sea coast, encompassing many small towns.

PERMIT FIX?

The decades-old practice of residency permits may be coming to an end, which will not be good news for this wall advertiser who sells "permanent and temporary" permits "cheap."

No more "Bush legs"

Despite pronouncements that relations are being reset, Russia and the U.S. are embroiled in another chicken war. Since the 1990s and the first Bush administration (thus the designation "Bush legs"), chicken has been a trade war weapon. Russia has pronounced U.S. chicken unsafe, due to the widely-used American industry practice of washing birds in chlorinated water. Russian sanitary officials argue that U.S. chicken producers were warned a year in advance that Russian laws were changing, but while Russian poultry producers upgraded their technology, U.S. exporters did not. Russia is one of the largest foreign markets for U.S. poultry, importing some \$800 million in chicken each year.

Unlikely fiancé

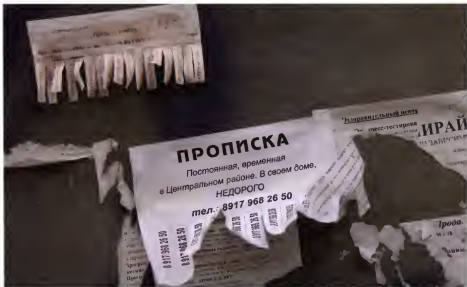
A Dagestani man detained near the Kremlin's Spassky Tower said he was late to a meeting with President Medvedev, whom he planned to ask for his daughter's hand. The man, a crane operator laid off from his job at a Moscow construction site, was taken to a psychiatric hospital, *Moskovsky Komsomolets* reported.

Russia gets a cathedral

The municipal court in Nice, France ruled in favor of returning that city's Orthodox cathedral to Russia. Construction of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas was financed by Tsar Nicholas II, who contributed his personal funds after construction ran over budget. The site had previously been occupied by a chapel constructed following the death of Alexander II's son in 1865, but in 1896 it was decided to build a church. St. Nicholas Cathedral is the largest Russian Orthodox church outside of Russia.

Best film

Vasily Sigarev's first film, *Volchok*, has received the White Elephant prize, meaning it was singled out by the Russian Movie Critics Guild as the best film of the year. The dark drama tells the story of a six-year-old girl who lives with her mother, who has just been released from prison. *Volchok* also collected prizes at the Zurich Film Festival and Russia's Kinotavr Festival.



End to Propiska?

Residential registration may be axed

In January, the Federal Migration Service announced it is working on a bill that would next year eliminate the nearly century-old Soviet/Russian practice of *propiska* — residence permits, in order to make employment migration easier.

The *propiska* system was implemented in the 1920s, as a way to control movement and fight metropolitan overcrowding. One's *propiska* determined all, from the ability to get housing and health care, to access to rations and schools.

Propiska was partially abolished by a 1993 law (insofar as it contradicted constitutional rights to freedom of movement), but never entirely removed. Instead it was replaced by a two-tiered system that retains the worst of the old system while introducing new loopholes. The new bill would seek to eradicate the system entirely, although there are countless threads strung to the system that would need to be cut throughout the economy.

republics, the Kremlin unexpectedly formed a new federal district that includes Stavropol region and the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Chechnya, Karachayev-Cherkessiya, Kabardino-Balkariya, and North Ossetiya.

The man singled out to pull the mountainous region out of poverty, corruption, and violence was Alexander Khloponin, a businessman turned governor of Siberia's sprawling Krasnoyarsk region. Khloponin's sudden career twist could be the first step to even higher positions, or it could be a form of political exile. Either way, President Dmitry Medvedev appears to be delivering on a promise he made during his State of the Nation address to find a man "personally responsible for the state of affairs in the North Caucasus." Khloponin's first test is overseeing presidential elections in Dagestan this year.

Blog Tales

Yeltsin's daughter recounts 1990s

Tatiana Yumasheva, the daughter of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president, unexpectedly became a wordy memoirist of the roaring 1990s after starting a blog on LiveJournal (t-yumasheva.livejournal.com) and using it to tell colorful stories from

Next Stop Caucasus

New job a blessing or a curse?

In an attempt to solve the problems of Russia's unruly Caucasus

"Prior to decentralizing, it must first be centralized."

President Dmitry Medvedev, on reform of the militia (*Kremlin.ru*)

"If we demand proper environmental standards now, we might as well admit there is no industry in Russia. It would all have to be stopped. There is no sense taking such action. All the old enterprises (the metallurgical and chemical complex, cellulose-paper production) are operating based on medieval, inadequate norms for environmental protection."

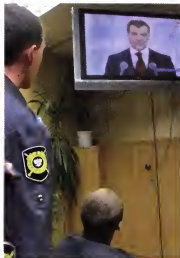
Yury Trutnev, Natural Resources and Environment Minister (*Vedomosti*)

"There are skeletons everywhere, even in our current political system. In the closet, under the bed. I wouldn't even be surprised if they were lying on the bed as well."

Nikita Belykh, governor of Kirov region (*Itogi.ru*)

"My mother got me and my brother out of Leningrad in the spring of 1942, across the fragmenting ice of Lake Ladoga. The ice was thin, the lake was being bombed, and several trucks went under. But I liked that fact that our car was going along like a motorboat, its sides battered by huge, angular waves."

Writer Andrei Bitov (*Esquire Russia*)



STYLING: ANDREI BITOV

"I've been a victim of my honesty for the past 15 years."

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, left (*Itogi.ru*)

"One could film a wonderful drama about the present day, but it would flop in theaters. Russia simply doesn't want to look at itself in the mirror. The Russian viewer categorically refuses to see himself in a detached way, and I have been trying to wrap my head around this for three years and still can't figure it out."

Movie producer Alexander Rodnyansky (*Sobesednik*)



STYLING: ANDREI BITOV

"What is annoying about today's humor? The lack of self-irony, which is the sign of a very clever, very worldly, intelligent person. Like me. If we had a high society, I would have long ago become its star. But we don't have a high society, so I have to make jokes and be ironic for my dinner, for my lunch. Just for food."

Comedian Mikhail Zhvanetsky, right (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*)



STYLING: ANDREI BITOV

"Russian scientist, Russian poet, Russian writer... but Russian businessman — that does not sound so good. If 'Russian scientist' has a positive ring to it all over the world, let's combine the two. That's what an innovative economy is all about. Especially since the Russian entrepreneur has only been around for 19 years."

Anatoly Chubais, in a speech at the Russia Forum (*Slon.ru*)

"There is a lot of money, so we need an economic manager rather than a tough guy. The era of the general-governor [in the Caucasus] is a thing of the past."

President Dmitry Medvedev, on appointing Alexander Khloponin envoy to the new North Caucasus Federal District (*Kommersant*)



Gaidar dead at 53

Russia's shock therapist passes away

Yegor Gaidar, the young economist appointed prime minister by President Boris Yeltsin in 1992, passed away at the age of 53 in December.

The son of Arkady Gaidar, a popular writer of children's stories in the Soviet era, Yegor Gaidar took most of the blame for the negative impact of economic reforms in the early 1990s. His so-called "shock therapy" caused hyperinflation, wiped out Soviets' savings overnight, and caused systemic cash shortages that led many factories to

Hobby with Benefits

President Dmitry Medvedev's photo of the Tobolsk kremlin, taken from a helicopter, fetched \$51 million at a recent charity auction in St. Petersburg. (Prime Minister Putin's painting of curtained, frosted window was sold last year for \$37 million.) The photo was purchased by Mikhail Zingarevich, who is on the board of directors of firm Group, a paper holding company where Medvedev worked before accepting a post in the government. Medvedev is long known as a photography enthusiast, and his camera shows the extent of his passion: the digital medium format Leica S2 is a new model, just released last year, and sells for about \$30,000.

Forbes squatting

In the first successful major case against cybersquatters, a Russian court recognized *Forbes* magazine as the rightful owner of *forbes.ru*, a website previously occupied by a company selling tours to the Arctic. While the site's owner said he named the website after James David Forbes, a scientist who studied glaciers, the magazine, which was one of the few Russian publications without its own website, sued the company last summer. The magazine later opened its website at *forbesrussia.ru*, but is expected to move to *forbes.ru* eventually. Last year, a website *sochi.ru* was also appropriated by the Sochi Olympic Organizing Committee, while the former owner, who maintained a portal of local city news, services, and a forum, was forced to move to *sochi.com*.

Less global than Ecuador

Russia is one of the world's least globalized industrial economies, according to a report from the Economist Intelligence Unit. The report ranked Russia 55 out of 60 among the world's largest economies, just above Indonesia and just below Ecuador, in a ranking that scored everything from trade policy to internet subscribers. At the top of the list were Singapore, Hong Kong and Ireland. Russia's score was 2.77 out of 5.0, which is up a bit from its 2.51 score in 1995.

Yeltsin's presidential terms. In her blog posts, Yumasheva, who is married to former head of the Presidential Administration Valentin Yumashev, has tried to dispel the myth that Yeltsin broke up the Soviet Union, analyzed why Vladimir Putin was chosen to succeed Yeltsin, described Boris Berezovsky and his involvement in politics, and added details to the biography of Roman Abramovich, from before he became an extravagant multimillionaire and owner of the British soccer club Chelsea.

The blogosphere was divided whether Yumasheva's frankness was just a whim, or if she might have political ambitions; it is not clear who gains by her giving the 1990s a rosy tint. Some speculated Yumasheva was casting an early ballot in support of President Dmitry Medvedev in the 2012 presidential elections; others saw it as connected to a conflict between businessman Oleg Deripaska (husband of Valentin Yumashev's daughter Polina), and several state banks over Deripaska's colossal debt (see below, "Money for Metal"). By showing her knowledge of the period, she could be warning the government of other secrets up her sleeve, including those implicating Russia's current leaders. Either way, her blog is entertaining to be sure.



pay their workers late, in worthless goods, or not at all.

Gaidar nonetheless was respected throughout the post-Soviet period despite widespread resentment of his government's policies. He argued that the reforms were the only way the remnants of the Soviet economy could be nursed back into shape.

After his brief term as prime minister (June-December 1992), Gaidar served most of the ensuing decade in the State Duma, heading the Democratic Choice of Russia party from 1994-2001. He also headed the Institute of Economics in Transition and frequently lectured abroad. At time of his unexpected death from pulmonary edema, he was reportedly working on a children's book.

Even after his death, Gaidar was the subject of controversy. Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and his predecessor Gavril Popov published a scathing editorial in *Moskovsky Komsomolets* newspaper even before the customary 40 days of mourning had passed, blaming the "bony hand of monetarism" for "turning Russia into a mine field for all its later leaders." Anatoly Chubais, who, because of his own role in 1990s economic mismanagement is still widely despised in Russia, wrote a letter to the editor, which called the editorial "dirty, envious, and an angry pack of lies."

Money for Metal

World's biggest aluminum company goes public

RusAl, the world's largest aluminum company, owned by Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska, completed an IPO in Hong Kong in an effort to raise money to pay off its creditors. Though shares sunk by nine percent at their debut, Deripaska seemed unfazed, attributing it to market volatility. Toasting guests with champagne, Deripaska presented the exchange with a 12-kilogram aluminum Russian doll on the day of RusAl's debut, Reuters reported.

RusAl, which has outstanding debts of \$14.9 billion, sold 10.6% of its shares for \$2.24 billion, which puts the company's value at \$21.05 billion. RusAl, one of Russia's most secretive companies, exposed some of its structure during the pre-IPO roadshow organized to lure investors. Its registration on Jersey Island allows it to pay only 10-13 percent in profit taxes, one fourth that of its American competitor Alcoa, which paid a profit tax of over 40 percent in 2008.

Avatar Conquers

Film exceeds expectations

Russia was no exception to the film *Avatar's* results in box offices around the world, raking in the fifth-biggest foreign returns from fans of James Cameron. Russians have fond memories of Cameron's *Titanic*, and flooded

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Pelevin outdoes Patriarch

Writer Viktor Pelevin is considered Russia's most influential intellectual, according to a non-scientific internet poll taken by opensepace.ru. Some 40,000 people voted for five candidates from a list of 350 Russians. Other intellectuals from the top ten include Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Patriarch Kirill, TV host Alexander Gordon, writer Boris Strugatsky, scientist Sergei Kapitsa, and politician and writer Eduard Limonov.

Big Macovich

McDonalds, which has been operating in Russia for 20 years, plans to open another 45 restaurants in Russia this year, each costing about \$3 million. Company CEO and Vice Chairman Jim Skinner said Russia is "undoubtedly" one of the places that offers the company its fastest return on investment, and called the corporation's achievements in Russia over the past two decades "extraordinary." There are 245 McDonalds in Russia today, serving some 950,000 customers daily.

Russian electric car

In an effort to innovate the outdated auto industry and get on the government's good side, Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov plans to develop Russia's first mass-produced electric car, hoping to create an affordable vehicle for city driving. The boxy car would be developed at the St. Petersburg Yarovit Motors Auto Plant and cost nearly €9,000, but Prokhorov's Onexim Group has not revealed further details. (slon.ru/articles/249398)

Fire prompts crackdown

Russian authorities closed over 2,700 nightclubs after a deadly fire killed 150 people in a Perm club this winter. Some 17,000 clubs were checked after a fire safety crackdown was announced by authorities in the wake of the tragedy. Pyrotechnics are no longer permitted during concerts, and are restricted during any mass events.

Moscow's modern 3D and two Imax theaters. One Imax theater had to introduce showings at 3 A.M. and 6 A.M. to accommodate the unprecedented demand.

Avatar's Russian box office of just over \$100 million at press time made it far and away the biggest grossing film in Russian history (the previous record was *Ironiya Sudby 2*, at \$50 million).

Avatar received extra press attention when the notoriously anachronistic Communists of Leningrad Region published a scathing web essay alleging that Cameron plagiarized the plot of *Avatar* from a story published by the Strugatsky brothers in the 1960s. Their rambling statement also claimed that *Avatar* was a political justification of President Obama's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. The organization, which is not officially affiliated with the Communist Party, last year attacked the most recent James Bond film for its negative portrayal of Russians.

Nobel Effort

Activist nominated for Peace Prize

Svetlana Gannushkina, a member of the governing board of the International Memorial Society and

director of the Civic Assistance Committee, has been nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize by Erna Solberg, leader of the Norwegian Conservative Party and a former Minister of Local Government and Regional Development in Norway.

Gannushkina is also a member of Russia's Presidential Council on Human Rights and Civil Society. Since the late 1980s she has devoted herself to the problems facing refugees and internally displaced persons in Russia.

"Partly I feel embarrassed, partly I feel hope that the world community will at last recognize the problems that exist in Russia with regard to the rule of law," Gannushkina said in an interview with BaltInfo. "I see this nomination as a response to the situation that exists in our country when the ordinary person is at the mercy of the arbitrary actions of those in authority and of criminal gangs."

Just two Russians have won the Nobel Peace Prize: Andrei Sakharov in 1975 and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990.

Baikal Threat

Polluting plant to restart on lakeshore

After sitting idle for 15 months, the paper mill that has polluted Lake Baikal since the 1960s is set to reopen after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a decree allowing it to release waste into the lake – the world's largest body of fresh water and a World Heritage Site.

The plant, which belongs to Oleg Deripaska's vast business empire (see "Money for Metal," above), was closed in 2008 after a decades-long battle by environmentalists. Putin's decision is apparently motivated by a desire to put the plant's 1500 employees back to work. The local government has been unable to find enough new jobs for them.

Although Baikalsk municipal authorities insist that the plant's



Svetlana Gannushkina

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV, dismissing environmental concerns for Baikal, related to the construction of the Baikal Paper and Pulp Plant: "Baikal, too, must work."



JAILED OLIGARCH Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who many believe was jailed for political crimes, recently received a literary award from ZNANYA magazine for his published correspondences with the writer Yulia Ulitskaya, in which they discussed jail, the nature of Russian society, and life. Khodorkovsky's daughter Anastasia, holds the prize.

reopening is temporary, nothing bars the factory's owner, Continental Management, from running it for years. Last August, Putin visited the lake and took a submarine ride on a research vessel, emerging to report that he thought the lake looked clean.

Slowing Abortions

Zhirinovsky proposes payouts

The ever-inventive politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky has proposed reducing the number of abortions in Russia by offering women considering an abortion \$100,000 to change their mind. President Dmitry Medvedev is leading the charge to reverse Russia's demographic decline and promised Zhirinovsky he would consider his proposals, which also include legalizing polygamy and building a sperm bank in every region of the country.

In 2009, Russia's population increased by 15-25,000 persons, to more than 141.9 million. It was the first annual increase since 1995, Health Minister Tatyana Golikova declared in January. The rise was helped by a four percent decline in mortality rates and an influx of immigrants from the FSU. Yet Golikova said that stemming the

number of abortions (Russia has one of the highest rates of abortion in the world, as it has long been a socially-accepted form of birth control here) is key to truly turning around Russia's demographic decline. "Our abortion rates are comparable to birth rates," Golikova said. In 2009, Russia had 1.7 million live births and 1.2 million abortions.

Dymovsky Silenced

YouTube sensation arrested

Alexei Dymovsky, the ex-policeman who aired the militia's dirty laundry via YouTube (see *Russian Life* Notebook, Jan/Feb 2010), has been arrested and jailed in Novorossiysk. Dymovsky, who became an overnight internet sensation with his video address to Vladimir Putin about police corruption and poor working conditions, was accused of slander, misusing \$27,000 given to him for operational work, and exerting pressure on an investigation, which supposedly necessitated putting him behind bars.

Dymovsky's lawyer countered the charges against his client by saying that all Russian policemen could thus be accused of stealing money, given the way the police accounting system files employee expenses.

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Skating Surge

After several lackluster seasons, Russian figure skaters returned to the top of the podium as the national team won three golds at the European Championships in Tallinn (Estonia) in January. The most spectacular win was delivered by Yevgeny Plyuschenko in men's singles, showing he had no intention of giving up his Olympic crown in February. It was Plyuschenko's sixth European gold – and his first medal of this caliber after his surprise comeback following a three-year long absence (see *Russian Life*, Nov/Dec 2009).

"I am just really proud, everything went well. Of course, the

most important competition this year will be the Olympic Games," said Plyuschenko, whose last major competition had been the 2006 Turin Games. He said it felt great "to beat those athletes who have been training every day all these three years. When I came back, they were all just smiling, thinking this is not possible."

Ice dancers Oksana Domnina and Maxim Shabalin won gold despite being outscored in two of their three dances by the Italian pair of Federica Faiella and Massimo Scali. The pair was sidelined by injury last year, but won the Europeans in 2008.

The third gold was won in pairs by Yuko Kawaguti and Alexander

Yuko Kawaguti and Alexander Smirnov

Smirnov. The Russo-Japanese pair thus won their first gold at such a major event, and Kawaguti was granted Russian citizenship so that she could compete in the Vancouver Olympics for Russia.

Bandy Upset

The Russian national squad failed to win gold at the Bandy 2010 World Championships held this year at Moscow's Krylatskoye Ice Sports Complex, losing to Sweden 6-5 in overtime. Russia took silver and the bronze went to Finland, which beat Kazakhstan in their final match.

This was the 30th Bandy World Championship held since the first competition in Finland, in 1957. Bandy is played on ice and is essentially hockey with a ball instead of a puck.

Over the 30 years of the championship, the Soviet/Russian and Swedish teams have each taken 29 medals. Russia has won 19 golds, while Sweden now has 10. The only other team to win gold was Finland, in 2004. Next year the championship will be held in Kazan (capital of Tatarstan).

Russian Truck Tsar

Russia's Vladimir Chagin won the 2010 Paris-Dakar Rally for the sixth time in the truck category, driving a Kamaz. A Kamaz truck won every stage in the 2010 event, finished both first and second, and picked up its ninth Dakar win. Chagin, who has been dubbed "Tsar" in the world of motor sport, won the race in 2000, 2002-2004 and 2006.

Russia's Favorite Sons



Yuri Gagarin
astronaut

35%



Vladimir Vysotsky
actor, singer, songwriter

31%



Georgy Zhukov
WWII Marshall

20%

Russians Who

Since 1995, the number of children in Russia has decreased from **38** million to **26.1** million (a 23% decline), while the total population decreased from **148.5** million to **142** million (down 4%). There are 10 pediatric medical centers in Russia, down from 18 in 2000, and 1.7 million children are on a waiting list to get into a preschool, up from 238,000 in 2000.

An estimated **70** criminals on Russia's Wanted List are hiding in the U.S.

15% of all payments that Russians made through phone text messages in 2009 were contributions to various scams – totalling **\$1.5 million** dollars.

Even though production in Russia in 2009 fell by an average of **16%**, production of caviar increased by **22%**, and production of mink pets grew by **34%**. Consumer items whose production fell by the most were women's coats (40%) and valenki (35%).

The number of Russian research papers published in 10,500 international scientific journals represents just **2.6%** of the global total, putting Russia **14th** in the world, behind China (8.4%), Canada (4.7%) and India (2.9%). The number of Russian published papers has been flat since the 1990s, while Chinese scientists have published eight times as many papers, and Brazilian scientists 14 times as many. In 2009, Russia spent **R168 billion** on scientific research.

Sochi has the 6th most expensive deluxe apartments in high rises, with a price of **€10,700** per m². The most expensive high rise real estate is in Monaco, at €84,500 per m². Real estate prices in Sochi increased by **5%** in 2009. Meanwhile, last year Russians spent **\$11.3 billion** on real estate outside of Russia.





The Hermitage (the green building in the background) put its foot down and raised entrance fees for foreigners, widening the gap from what is charged for Russian visitors.

Hermitage Reneges

The State Hermitage Museum abandoned its announced plan to equalize its entrance fees for Russian and foreign tourists. Director Mikhail Piotrovsky had promised to level ticket prices (which cost foreigners R350 and Russians R100), but the museum ended up doing exactly the opposite: raising foreigner ticket prices to R400.

"Russians don't live well enough to pay the full fee," Piotrovsky explained to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The discriminatory pricing principle has long infuriated both tourists and the tourism industry. The Hermitage, one of the most famous museums in the world, is visited by 2.5 million people every year, of which 500,000 are foreigners. Setting different price levels is a common practice in Russian museums and other attractions.

Border Reopens

The border crossing between Russia and Georgia will start work-

ing again on March 1, Foreign Ministry officials promised. The checkpoint was closed in 2006 for reconstruction, which coincided almost exactly with the beginning of a diplomatic freeze and subsequent halt of direct flights between the two countries. While flights have recently resumed for several charters, the renovated checkpoint had yet to be opened, despite being announced as ready last September.

Fish Story

Russia's largest salt water aquarium has opened in Sochi. It boasts 4000 species of fish in its 29 aquariums. The launch of the aquarium was not without tragic delays, however: when, last summer, customs officials held several containers of fish from Asia for several hours, citing incomplete documentation, most of the fish died in the heat. More recently, Sochi customs has not allowed in two leopards brought from Turkmenistan as a gift for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The

animals have been marooned in the customs zone for six months due to an inability to affix their value.

Cultural Restoration

Russia and the World Bank will invest \$250 million in a program to restore cultural heritage sites and turn them into tourist attractions. The plan includes landmarks between Moscow and St. Petersburg, in four different regions of Russia. The World Bank will pitch in \$100 million, while the federal budget will foot the rest of the bill. Regional authorities submitted 40 sites for inclusion in the program, including Yefremovo estate near Gatchina in Leningrad region (the childhood home of Vladimir Nabokov), Mon Repos Manor, one of the towers in Vyborg fortress, Catherine the Great's Putevoy Palace in Novgorod region, several notable structures in Pskov, including the Pogankin chambers and kremlin, and historical landmarks in Torzhok and Tver. The final program list has not been published yet, but it also is rumored to include construction of a facility for art restoration and storage.

Lost in Translation

The *St. Petersburg Times* reported in February that authorities have inexplicably begun enforcing a 2003 regulation that requires passengers to clear lost luggage through customs themselves (rather than have it cleared by airline personnel). Needless to say, traveling back out to one of the capitals' distant airports is inconvenient when one is there for a limited time as a tourist, and it can be an impossible exercise if one has already taken a connect-



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R1 = \$0.033

\$1 = R30.36

ing flight to a distant city. According to the *Times*, travelers with missing luggage have typically signed waivers allowing airlines to take their bags through Russian customs when they are found, so they can be delivered to their owners. Yet, said Alexei Fomin, a customs officer at Domoedovo Airport in Moscow, such waivers are no longer valid.

Snap Decision

The Federal Protective Service has promised to finally allow high-quality photography in and around the Kremlin and Red Square, lifting a rule that has long infuriated professional photographers. The rule, introduced in 2008, made photographers who used tripods and professional equipment a constant target of harassment, if their camera was larger than 14 x 25 centimeters (roughly 5 x 10 inches) or had a lens larger than seven centimeters (2 1/2 inches). The rule was imposed to

discourage the Kremlin being used as a backdrop for advertising campaigns, one anonymous Kremlin source told *Gazeta.ru*, since "people in hamburger costumes near the Kremlin are an insult."

Alphabet Soup

Sheremetyevo airport is rebranding its terminals, changing from a numeric scheme to one that uses letters. The main Sheremetyevo-2 terminal (international flights) will be renamed Terminal F, Sheremetyevo-1 (domestic flights) will become Terminal B, Sheremetyevo-3, which was opened last fall, will be known as Terminal D, and a new Terminal E is set to open this year.

Run Salmon, Run

A tourism and education "Salmon Park" will reportedly be built on Sakhalin Island as part of a program to preserve Russia's wild salmon. The park will include a trail

along a river where salmon spawn, a museum, and a conference hall. Construction will reportedly begin this year, though the facility's precise location has not been announced. It is part of a three-year program organized by Sakhalin Energy and the Wild Salmon Center, an international organization.

Icy Comforts

A snow hotel opened this year in Arkhangelsk region. The building, constructed in the shape of a heart, is made of ice from forest lakes and includes a hall for wedding receptions, a movie theater, and a temperature of 0° C (32° F).

Snow and ice hotels have been built in several northern countries, but this is Russia's first. It is in the Ustyansk district of Arkhangelsk region, on the territory of Malinova Ski Resort, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported.

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TRAVELING

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Named Moscow's top orchestra in a *Gramophone* magazine poll of international music critics, the RNO has been in demand throughout the music world ever since its 1990 premiere. Of the orchestra's 1996 debut at the BBC Proms in London, the *Evening Standard* wrote, "They played with such captivating beauty that the audience gave an involuntary sigh of pleasure." This highly-acclaimed symphony orchestra is not to be missed.

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European Tour: Lyon, France (3/21) • Dijon, France (3/22) • Budapest, Hungary (3/26) • Baden-Baden, Germany (5/23) • Dresden, Germany (5/30)

rno.ru

Moscow Festival Ballet

Giselle – The romantic tale of a young peasant girl who falls in love with a count disguised as a villager. When Giselle discovers the truth about her lover's identity and his engagement, she dies of madness and joins the ghosts of girls who avenge the evil deeds of the men who have jilted them. **Date:** 4/16/10, George Mason University, Fairfax VA (888-945-2468). Tickets: \$27-54. [gmu.edu/cfa]

Coppelia – A young villager falls in love with a life-size dancing doll, Coppelia, the creation of the diabolical Dr. Coppélius, much to the chagrin of his fiancé Swanilda, who decides to show him his folly by dressing as the doll and pretending to come to life. **Dates:** 3/24/10, Osterhout Concert Theater, Binghamton NY (607-777-ARTS). Tickets: \$41. [anderson.binghamton.edu] • 4/17/10, George Mason University, Fairfax VA (888-945-2468). Tickets: \$27-54. [gmu.edu/cfa] • 5/01/10 to 5/03/10, Folly Theater, Kansas City MO (816-415-5025). [harriman-jewell.org]

MIDWEST

MINNESOTA

Matryoshka: The Russian Nesting Doll

A new exhibition of *matryoshkas* on loan from a private collector in San Francisco. The dolls on display were produced over several decades and will include pre-WWII dolls as well as dolls from various regional centers of *matryoshko* production during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. **Date(s):** Through

3/29/10, Fireside Gallery, Minneapolis MN (612-821-9045). Tickets: \$5.

tmora.org

MINNESOTA

Moscow State Radio Symphony Orchestra

This orchestra was founded in 1978 with the purpose of broadcasting the expansive symphonic repertoire of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries throughout Russia and for the past 30 years has toured the globe, performing exquisite works by Russian composers. **Date:** 3/06/10, Folly Theater, Kansas City MO (816-415-5025). [harriman-jewell.org]

ILLINOIS

Sleeping Beauty

With its roots extending back to 1870, The Tchaikovsky Ballet, located in Perm, is one of Russia's most distinguished artistic companies. The company specializes in performing Tchaikovsky's work, including Petipa's *Sleeping Beauty*. **Dates:** 3/20-21/10, Auditorium Theatre, Chicago IL (312.922.2110). Tickets: \$30-87.

auditoriumtheatre.org

EAST

VERMONT

Views and Re-Views

Soviet Political Posters and Cartoons
Nearly twenty years after the demise of the Soviet Union, *Views and Re-Views* invites a post-Cold War assessment of Soviet graphic arts and presents a stunning array of images spanning more than six decades from the time of the Russian Civil War to the late Soviet period. **Dates:** Through 05/23/10, Fleming Museum, Burlington VT (802-656-0750). Tickets: \$5.

flemingmuseum.org

PENNSYLVANIA

Russian Troika Festival

A three-day festival featuring authentic Russian food, drink, gifts, tea room and baked goods. Entertainment by world-renowned folk group Barynya. Friday, May 28 (11 am to 9 pm), Saturday, May 29 (11 am to 4 pm), Sunday, May 30 (noon to 9 pm). Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity, Erie, PA. Admission is free.

churchofthenativity.net

NEW YORK

Russian Icon Exhibit

An exhibit of mosaic icons created in the tradition of Byzantine masters. Fashioned from tiny bits of glass fit together to bring forth a divine image, the icons are created

by Oksana Prokopenko, a Ukrainian artist now living in New York. Oksana's work received a new impetus and divine inspiration following the tragedy of September 11th. Oksana found a way to reassemble the shattered pieces of glass that fell out of the sky when the World Trade Center's came crashing to the ground. Oksana was present in downtown Manhattan on the morning of 9-11 with her family and through her fortitude and courageous insight was able to create strikingly beautiful, other worldly icons, each composed of hundreds and in some cases thousands of tiny pieces of colored glass. **Dates:** 05/20/10 to 06/13/10, Ukrainian Institute of America, New York NY (212-842-0226). Tickets: free.

oksanapro.com

CONNECTICUT

Traditional Russian Folk Boots

In the display case of the Gunn Memorial Library there will be an exhibit and sale of traditional Russian winter footwear called *Valenki*. An opening reception, which is free and open to the public, will be held on Saturday, February 6 from 1-3 p.m. **Dates:** Through 03/06/10, Gunn Memorial Library and Museum, Washington CT (860-868-7586).

SOUTH

NORTH CAROLINA

Uncle Vanya

Maly Drama Theatre of St. Petersburg
Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* remains a classic of Russian theater — a play of tragic and tangled love combining comic scenes of the everyday with a scathing attack on the idle provincial life of the upper classes. With costumes inspired by the first production of *Uncle Vanya* by the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1899, The Maly Drama Theatre of St. Petersburg — one of the great arts ensembles of Russia — captures the very essence of Chekhov's poignant and affecting vision, offering a rare and superb opportunity to see *Uncle Vanya* in Chekhov's original Russian, presented by those who understand it best. **Date:** 3/31/10, Memorial Hall, Chapel Hill NC (919-843-3333).

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* Complete listings online at
russianlife.com

Perestroika

March 1985, Gorbachev takes over

ONE GLOOMY NOVEMBER DAY in 1982, all television and radio broadcasts were suddenly interrupted and the Soviet people, who immediately guessed what was going on, found the airwaves filled with the sounds of somber classical music. On the day of "dear Leonid Ilyich's" funeral I was supposed to take care of some paperwork for my upcoming maternity leave - my due date was fast approaching. As instructed, I set out for my clinic.

When I got there, all the doctors' examination rooms were empty - no doctors, no patients. Maybe something had happened? Like a scene from a suspense movie, I made my way carefully through the clinic, following whatever sounds I could hear. I found all the doctors sitting around a television set with a ring of pregnant women standing behind them. They all watched intently as a procession of 44 (44!) officers marched behind the coffin, carrying all the various medals and orders that had brought such joy to the senile old man in his later years. We could see the hands of the pallbearers trembling as they lowered the coffin into the ground.

"Couldn't you have come on some other day?" my doctor asked in irritation, annoyed at having to tear herself away from this fascinating spectacle.

The reign of decrepitude had come to an end, but what was beginning? Andropov, who by comparison with his predecessor seemed exceedingly energetic, inspired hope. (He knows English! He writes poetry! But what about his KGB roots? Yes, but he knows English!) There was a clean break with the past, but it did not go very well.

Here and there were meetings at which intellectuals who had been dreaming of the most modest changes discussed something or other, but nothing ever came of it. Not only were store windows bare, as before, but now there were hardly any shoppers. This was part-



Mikhail's Roadshow
Mikhail Gorbachev and his faction within the leadership initiated a slate of reforms that they hoped would make the system work more efficiently and openly. But the system had other plans, and reforms soon turned to renovations, which then turned into something just short of revolution.

ly because of Andropov's most memorable initiative: a campaign to instill worker discipline. Document checks were conducted to find people who had left their jobs in the middle of the day to run errands. It was said that sometimes movie theaters would suddenly stop mid-film so that the audience could be checked for shirkers. I went to the store in delicious anticipation of being "caught" by the police, hoping to disappoint them with the news that I had every right not to be at work, as I was still on maternity leave.

Brezhnev's successors were barely able to lead the country for a year before they died, one after another, as if an entire era was in its death throes. Andropov, who did not leave the hospital during his final six months at the helm, departed this world and was replaced by someone nobody had heard of: the hapless Konstantin Chernenko, who was thrust forward by his fellow Politburo members (to

Mikhail Gorbachev meets with residents of Leningrad, in May 1985, soon after assuming the top leadership post in the Soviet Politburo.

SELECT 7: Only seven men ever filled the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Joseph Stalin (1922-1953, although technically the post did not exist from 1927-1953), Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964), Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), Yuri Andropov (1982-1984), Konstantin Chernenko (1984-1985), Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) and Vladimir Iashin (for the five days in 1991 between Gorbachev's resignation and the abolition of the Communist Party).

universal derision) in order to buy them time to continue the real power struggle. A year later, in March 1985, poor, unfortunate Chernenko also died, mourned by few outside his family. How long would this succession of sickly leaders continue?

Then, suddenly, there was a new name in the air: "Gorbachev"... and a new, unfamiliar face to get used to. He looked spry and fit, and at 54 he was a mere child compared to the rest of the Politburo.

What happened next was utterly unbelievable. From our television screens we heard words that many people had been afraid to utter in the privacy of their own kitchens. It

Sergeyevich himself at the time was sincerely convinced that we just had to marshal our effort, build more factories to produce tractors and especially rockets, introduce more computers into the country, and replace manual labor with robots (he actually said this!), and our problems would be solved. We also had to get tougher on "crooks," a category that included both those who broke into apartments and those who were simply trying to apply the laws of a free market to an absurd economic landscape — *kolkhoz* chairmen who, by hook or by crook (probably the latter) were trying to make money, and the founders of underground workshops illicitly producing, not drugs, not weapons, but handbags, which were in great demand. These deviants from central planning were the ones causing all the trouble!

And of course, as always happens during times of change or crisis, another culprit was identified — drunkenness — and they started to limit the hours during which wine, liquor, and even glassware could be sold. Vodka was only available a few hours a day, and people were supposed to have "sober" weddings (what a joke!). You even needed special coupons to buy vodka for funeral feasts (*pominki*). The moonshine stills were of course going "full steam" and cheap eau de cologne disappeared from store shelves, along with anything else that could be drunk or sniffed. All this was supposed to help our great leap forward.

Nowadays we tend to mainly remember the assortment of absurd ideas that bubbled up in the spring of 1985. But we should also remember that this was a time we felt a sudden surge of hope. Mikhail Sergeyevich's long — endlessly long — speeches prompted more excitement than ridicule and, overall, this excitement was deserved. Here was a man who believed in what he was saying, and this alone was extraordinary. He believed that we needed to "accelerate," that computers and

robots would lead the country out of crisis, that you could convince people not to drink and that for those who were beyond convincing, we could just refuse to sell them vodka. He also believed that we did not have to fight with America, that our enemy could become our friend, and that basic human values were more important than the "proletarian internationalism" that we were all sick to death of and that had compelled us to give money to communist thugs all over the world. And, most important, he believed that it was possible to do something, that not all was lost for the country, and that meant a lot.

I remember how, one evening that strange spring, they broadcast one of Gorbachev's endless speeches. By then I had two small children and they had just been put to bed. It was time to relax. Instead, my husband and I sat glued to the television screen, listening to a speech about our economy's problems and the role of scientific and technical progress. We turned our attention away from the screen just long enough to exclaim to one another in amazement, "Goodness, what is he saying? Now he's talking!" before again immersing ourselves in his speech. Back then, there was nothing more important than Gorbachev's verbose and somewhat flawed reasoning.

Then everything changed. There was talk of political freedom and individual enterprise. The wall fell and the world started to open up. A little later, blood was spilled in various corners of the country, and Gorbachev stopped looking so wonderful. People started to regard him with scorn and bitterness. It would be a while before they were able feel any sympathy toward him.

Only now, a quarter century later, am I able to recognize how marvelous the spring of 1985 was. It truly seemed possible to change everything for the better without any blood or horror.

We just needed more computers.

Not the whole truth, but at least some small iota of it was finally being said out loud...

was "revealed" that our country was lagging behind America, and instead of overtaking the rest of the world and serving as a paragon of economic development, we had problems. Problems? We had problems? Of course we all knew we had problems, but to have the leadership admit it, and in front of the entire country...

What Gorbachev introduced in 1985 probably sent chills down the spines of Soviet political insiders and, a few years later, once he saw what he had done, down his own. But what euphoria it unleashed! For the first time the truth — not the whole truth, but at least some small iota of it — was being said out loud, that our economy was not as wonderful as we had been pretending.

This admission was followed by some rather preposterous proposals, first, that there had to be an "acceleration" — we had to produce as much as we possibly could. This would return us to the forefront of economic development. (Quality, meanwhile, was never discussed.) I do not doubt that Mikhail



Bobby v. Tolya

April 1975: the greatest chess match that never was

IN MARCH 1943, a boy named Bobby was born in Chicago to a Jewish mother who had fled the Nazi takeover of Europe. Eight years later, in May 1951, a boy named Tolya was born into a working-class family in the industrial city of Zlatoust, in the Urals region of Russia. One would have thought that the distance between these two boys, in terms of geography, language, and class, would have been so great that there was almost no chance they would ever learn of each other's existence, to say nothing of come into contact. But there was one common force in both of their lives that drew them into one another's orbit.

When Bobby was six years old and his family had been living in Brooklyn, New York for almost four years, his sister taught him to play chess. At the age of 13 he became United States Junior Chess Champion and one year later he became the overall U.S. Champion.

Tolya was taught to play chess by

his father at age five. At the age of 14 he had not achieved the same level of success as Bobby, but he was nevertheless a Soviet Master of Sport and by 18 he became Junior World Champion. One year later he became Soviet Champion.

The early 1970s was the dawn of a Golden Era for chess, especially in the USSR.

By then, the young, ambitious, and exceptionally talented Bobby Fischer and Anatoly Karpov already knew about one another and likely assumed that their paths would ultimately cross.

The early 1970s marked the dawn of a golden era for chess, espe-

cially in the USSR. Chess clubs thrived in schools and Pioneer centers. On the boulevards, amateurs would spend hours rubbing their chins, hunched thoughtfully over chessboards. Chess had the distinction of being simultaneously a "popular" and an elite pastime. You could find a chessboard in any House of Culture. You could buy large, wooden chess sets with heavy pieces, or miniature, light ones with little pins sticking out of the bottom of each piece – traveling sets that let you stick queens and bishops into special holes so they would not get lost if the train lurched. There were chess sets sold in combination with checkers – if you wanted you could play a more intellectually challenging game, or you could relax and move the checkers around. A popular form of entertainment at Soviet "Houses of Rest" were huge outdoor chess sets with a "board" painted on the ground and pieces almost the size of human beings.

But at the same time, chess was

**CHESS TITANS
CIRCA 1975**

**Left:
Bobby Fischer**

**Right:
Anatoly Karpov**

not a game played by little ruffians. The stereotype of a chess player was a tousle-headed boy in glasses oblivious to everything around except the pieces on the board. Chess was traditionally thought of as a "Jewish" game. You could stop a Jewish boy from getting into university or not hire a Jew for a job, but how could you stop Botvinnik, Tal, or Korchnoy from winning at chess? "Jewish brains are good for chess," was the conventional wisdom, and

being amazed by their simple folk wisdom, their integrity and straightforwardness. The 1960s provided a new hero. *Nine Days in One Year*, a film by director Mikhail Romm, romanticized the profession of physicist. The ironic, intellectual scientists, played by the fascinating Alexey Batalov and Innokenty Smoktunovsky, could contemplate the most profound questions of philosophy, yet also split atoms. And what game do you imagine they

chess champions were all Soviet citizens, and chess was firmly implanted in the Soviet consciousness as "our" game.

Then, suddenly, from out of distant and mysterious Brooklyn there appeared an American upstart, Bobby Fischer, and he began beating everyone. Fischer immediately captivated everyone's attention. His strange behavior, his youth and impertinence, his stunning successes all won him hearts all over the world, including in the country where he managed to take down an entire generation of great chess players. Bobby Fischer crushed brilliant Soviet chess players with offhanded ease. He beat them at countless tournaments and Olympiads. He bulldozed the brilliant Mark Taimanov, destroying him in a match to decide who would face the world champion. Taimanov never recovered from the humiliation inflicted by Fischer, who beat him 6-0. Fischer also shut out the Dane Bent Larsen.

After this, the indefatigable Bobby focused his talents on defeating the commanding heights of Soviet chess. Tigran Petrosian held on a little longer than most, for a score of 6.5-2.5. Psychologists and chess players began to seriously distinguish between players who had been "broken" by Fischer and those who still had not been through the meat grinder.

In their titanic match in Reykjavik, in the summer of 1972, Boris Spassky battled long and hard and did not give in easily – the score for that encounter was 12.5-8.5. Bobby behaved terribly, skipped the first game, was late to others, threw tantrums, was capricious, but once he sat down at the board he was transformed into a steely machine.*

Interesting things were going on in the USSR at this time. Everyone seemed to be rooting for Spassky, who bravely bore a superhuman burden. The results of each game were reported on radio and television. National news broadcasts

Besides being a source of Soviet pride, chess earned millions for the country...

Jewish mothers did not argue with this, sending their sons off to chess clubs. Nobody drew such sweeping conclusions about the Armenian brain based on Petrosian or the Russian brain based on Spassky, but no matter – a stereotype would not be a stereotype if it could withstand close scrutiny.

Chess may be exceptionally absorbing, but it does not lend itself to gambling. It is not like a card game that you can use to fleece a chance traveling companion in just a few minutes. A real game lasts five hours, and the players keep track of their total time by pressing buttons on a special game clock that gives the whole process an aura of seriousness. There is, of course speed chess, where each player has a total of only five minutes for all his or her moves, but even here neither luck nor cards up your sleeves will do you any good. In short, for chess you need a good head, but no matter how clever you are you will not be viewed as a "card shark."

The sixties and the seventies was a time when the *intelligentsia* was being subtly rehabilitated. In movies in the 1930s, members of the *intelligentsia* had to be shown learning something from the workers and



played? They certainly weren't slapping their cards down on the table with a loud exclamation of "rummy!" Their game of choice was of course chess.

Beside being an officially recognized source of Soviet pride, a "sport" celebrated on a par with figure skating and soccer, chess was popular throughout the entire world and earned millions for the country. Soviet chess champions could only catch a fleeting glimpse of these millions before joyously turning them over to their beloved motherland. For 24 years, the quarter century between 1948 and 1972, the world

* This famous match is the centerpiece of the excellent book, *Bobby Fischer Goes to War* (2005).

showed the boards for each game and the radio gave a play-by-play, while thousands of people throughout the country took notes and went for their chessboards, replicated the games, and sunk into deep contemplation. Schoolchildren and retirees, workers and housewives, society ladies with little concept of the rules governing each piece – everyone was talking, not so much about the match itself as about Bobby Fischer.

Fischer won, and Spassky was never able to attain his former level. An ironic underground song by Vladimir Vysotsky became popular. It started like this:

*I cried out, "How could you do that?
How could you let our honor be
defiled?"
And they told me in our chess club,
"Great, you go and defend it!
But keep in mind that Fischer's pretty
bright,
He sleeps with a chessboard, has
special powers.
His game is clean, he doesn't make
mistakes."
"That's okay, I'm also no pushover.
And I've got a special knight move in
reserve."*

Я кричал: "Вы что там, обалдели,
Уронили шахматный престиж!"
"Да? - сказали в нашем спортотделе, -
Вот прекрасно, ты и защитишь.
Но учти, что Фишер очень ярок,
Даже спит с доскою, - сила в нем.
Он играет чисто, без помарок..."
Ничего, я тоже не подарок,
У меня в запасе ход конем.

In Vysotsky's song, the "knight's move" winds up being something a bit more violent than a chess move and Fischer, seeing the biceps on the Soviet superman flying toward him, immediately agrees to a draw.

In reality, it was the turn of Anatoly Karpov – part of a new generation of chess players and someone yet "unbroken" by Fischer – to face the indomitable Bobby. What hopes, what expectations were

invested in him! But Fischer made yet another unpredictable move. Unable to overcome his assorted phobias and after lengthy negotiations, he never showed up for the match. In April 1975, Karpov became World Champion simply because he beat all the contenders who did show up.

The Soviet people should have rejoiced, but the victory was a hollow one. It was tainted by a sense that something had been left undone and unsaid. After all, it would never be settled who was the better player of the two. Karpov apparently also sensed this and made surreptitious attempts to meet with Bobby and agree on a match. There were rumors of a meeting with Fischer in Japan, something that reportedly got Karpov in trouble with the KGB. It is difficult to say whether or not this is true. The Mt. Olympus of Chess is obscured by dense storm clouds and the rumbling from there can be very difficult to interpret.

In any event, Bobby Fischer never again participated in an official chess tournament.

Completely different fates, each tragic in their own way, awaited Fischer and Karpov. Fischer's mental health continued to decline and he eventually lost the ability to interact with the world around him. He said awful things about the United States, made anti-Semitic statements (which must have had his Jewish ancestors turning over in their graves), wound up in a Japanese jail for illegal immigration, and in the end died of kidney failure in Reykjavik, largely forgotten and unloved.

A brilliant chess career awaited Anatoly Karpov, but so did terrible psychological torments. Chess became increasingly politicized. To the mental stresses of the game were added ideological pressures. First, Karpov had to play a match against Viktor Korchnoy, his former friend (who had defected to the west in 1976), and the battle of the chess-

board was cast as a battle between two worlds – the Soviet world and the West, and the mutual hatred of the players only added piquancy to this intellectual bullfight. Later, he found himself drawn into a long-standing duel with Garry Kasparov, which was viewed as much a confrontation between party functionaries (who supported Kasparov) and liberals (who supported Karpov), as a battle between two great chess players. A decision to halt the match was made at the highest lev-

PHOTO: M. KOSLOVSKY / AP



CHUKCHI CHESSMASTERS? Chess enjoyed a golden age during the 1960s and 1970s, as witnessed in this (likely staged) photo of "Kamchatka reindeer herders on break" from 1969.

els of the Soviet government. In the 1980s, to say you were for Karpov or for Kasparov (even if you had no idea what e2-e4 means) said everything that needed to be said about your political orientation.

Passions over chess have long since subsided. Chess clubs have been dying off and the life-sized chessboards at resorts are in need of repair. A few retirees may be moving around giant chess pieces, but it is a lot easier now to just play poker on the internet. Furthermore, there are ever more powerful computers that play the game increasingly well. The battle for the title of World Champion has lost the romantic luster it once had.

The golden age of chess has passed.



Stalin and his "boyars" at the 16th Party Congress, June 1930. In front, from left, Valerian Kuybyshev, Joseph Stalin, Sergei Kirov. In back, from left, Mikhail Kalinin, Kliment Voroshilov.

Dizzy with Success

Stalin backtracks, March 2, 1930

How well did Joseph Stalin know history?

A seminary drop-out, he of course knew a thing or two about past eras, but it would be a stretch to assume that he had extensive, in-depth knowledge of history. It does appear, however, that where he felt they were relevant to him, Joseph Vissarionovich did indeed draw lessons from the past.

One of the most important qualities for politicians – the ability to get their way at any cost – seems to be something Stalin came by naturally, without any book learning. But there

was one recurring theme of Russian history in which the cunning and resourceful tyrant was well versed: "the Kind Tsar and the Evil *Boyars*." According to this popular conception, the Russian tsar was viewed as benevolent and all injustice perpetrated by Moscow (it was assumed) was the work of an evil inner circle of *boyars* or courtiers. Boris Godunov, for example, was a wise and relatively humane tsar for his time, but he was scorned because he came from the ranks of the *boyars*, and, without giving it a second thought, thousands of his countrymen threw their support

behind the numerous pretenders who came along to proclaim themselves "true" tsars.

At what point in his development did Soso* become aware that in order to secure power he had to create the image of a just (albeit stern) tsar? Can we find any clues to this from our current vantage point?

By all appearances, he began to draw on this lesson of history rather early. Even in the mid-1920s, when he was battling the United Opposition of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Trotsky, Stalin understood exactly what buttons to push in the public consciousness. The opposition was calling for the creation of a mighty industrial infrastructure – and where would the money come from? Of course from the peasants, from the "petty bourgeois" peasants, who, as owners of private property, could be easily scorned. They could serve as a sort of "internal colony" to be exploited by the proletariat... Stalin, however, would not stand for this.

But wait – isn't that exactly what Stalin himself did? Wasn't he the one who launched forced industrialization, wasn't he the one who began the mad race of the Five Year Plans, committing thousands of workers to the cold ground, creating huge factories, and starving millions of peasants who were supposed to pay for the future military might of the USSR with their suffering? Yes, but that was not until the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1925-26, when he was fighting the oppositionists, Stalin said just the opposite.

He vilified the opposition for attempting to undermine the alliance between the working class and the peasantry: How can we possibly call for robbing the peasantry? How can we possibly turn our backs

* "Soso" was Stalin's earliest nickname, short for Ioset (Joseph). His full, given Georgian name was (transcribed into Latin): Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili. His first revolutionary nickname was "Koba," from the Caucasian bandit-hero in Alexander Kazbegi's novel, *The Patriarch*. Later he adopted the name Stalin, "Man of Steel."

on the working peasant? No, Comrade Stalin would not let Trotsky and company harm the rural proletariat...

This was our first glimpse of Stalin as Tsar-Defender.

And just two years later (just two!), before a new generation had come to the fore, before the sound of past slogans and arguments had faded, the policy of the party changed and the country heard the at first unfamiliar and later very familiar but no less awful word "*kolkhoz*." Initially, persuasion was used on the peasants. Then that persuasion became increasingly forceful. Finally, they were given no choice. More and more collective farms were established, and the peasants had to hand over their cattle, grain stores, and horses.

On November 7, 1929 an article by Stalin appeared in *Pravda* entitled, "The Year of the Great Break." Readers were "informed" that the majority of peasants had already decided, on their own initiative, to part with their property and begin a new life devoted to the cause of building communism on the collective farm. The *kolkhoz* was now, it turned out, home not only to the poorest of peasants (who had no property to forfeit), but middle peasants as well, perhaps not the most prosperous subset of rural peasantry, but certainly the most numerous. This being the case, it was high time to move to mass collectivization and completely do away with private property and hired labor in the countryside.

This marked the beginning of one of Stalinism's cruelest and most horrifying episodes. During the brutal winter of 1929-1930, party leaders and *kolkhoz* chairmen dragged, herded, and shoved the unfortunate peasantry into collective farms. Throughout the entire country, they "*dekulakized*" prosperous peasants (i.e., *kulaks*) – sometimes to the delight of their poor neighbors and sometimes to their horror. Even those *kulaks* who had accepted the

inevitable and been willing to join the collective farms were now "unmasked." It turns out that they had actually just been playing along in order to sabotage the building of socialism from within.

Everywhere churches were being closed, converted into clubs or warehouses, and priests were being arrested. *Kulak* families were herded like cattle into exile, and a huge proportion of them did not make it to their remote destinations, done in by hunger and disease along the way.

Stalin cunningly manipulated people, inciting the rural have-nots against the haves, and those who lacked the stomach to plunder their neighbors were given a helping hand by workers dispatched from the cities, who had been informed that people were starving because the *kulaks* and their henchmen were killing off cattle and destroying grain supplies.

As one woman later recalled, now a school principal but then a young *komsomol* member who had been sent to the countryside during the horrors of 1929, her heart ached for the starving and freezing peasants, but it was impossible not to carry out the assignment she had been given by the party. So, with tears in her eyes, she went from house to house with armed members of the proletariat to drag out anyone they had been ordered to consider a *kulak*.

This process did not always go as smoothly as Stalin would have liked. Today historians are unearthing mountains of evidence – primarily denunciations by NKVD informers – of peasant resistance: attempts to prevent the *kulaks* from being sent away or to form human chains around churches to stop their destruction, until troops arrived. There are scholars who believe that the USSR was on the brink of civil war during the winter of 1929-1930.

And then, suddenly, Stalin recalled his history lessons and understood that the image of the kind tsar had to be reinforced every now and then. On March 2, 1930,

Stalin, who up to that point had been mercilessly driving local authorities toward rapid collectivization, reversed course.

An interesting depiction of what happened can be found in a book that was one of the most supportive of the cause of collectivization, that most glorified it, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, by Mikhail Sholokhov. True, there are accounts suggesting that Sholokhov attempted to accu-

One of the most important qualities for politicians—the ability to get their way at any cost—was something Stalin came by naturally...

rately portray what happened, covering himself by contextualizing these descriptions with the "correct" reasoning of the story's pro-Soviet protagonists. Whatever the case may be, *Virgin Soil Upturned* is dreadful from a literary perspective, but intriguing from an historical one.

Here we see Davydov, having just arrived in the countryside to "upturn virgin soil," discussing *kulak* policy with a party secretary, who obviously favors acting as moderate-ly as possible.

"You said something to me about being careful with the *kulaks*. Just what did you mean by that?" Davydov asked.

"Let me put it this way," the secretary said with a fatherly smile. "There are *kulaks* who are meeting their assigned grain production targets and there are others who stubbornly refuse. In the second case things are clear-cut: charge them under Article 107 and be done with it. But in the first case it's more complicated. How would you, for instance, deal with this sort?"

Davydov thought for a moment. "I would give him a new target."



Where Do We Sign?

A propaganda photo from February 1930, with smiling peasants eagerly lining up to join a kolkhoz.

"Oh, that's a fine way to do things! No, Comrade, that won't work. You'd undermine trust in everything we're doing. And what will the average peasant think then? He'll say to himself, 'So that's the way it is! Soviet power! Pushing the peasant around every which way.' That, my friend, is childishness."

"Childishness?" Davydov turned beet red.

"Seems like you think Stalin made a mistake, eh?"

"What does Stalin have to do with it?"

"I read the speech he gave at the conference of Marxists, of those, what do you call 'em? Those landonomists, er, agronomists?"

Here is a clear sign of the times – this was taking place in December 1929, just when Stalin had called for the "elimination of the *kulaks* as a class" at a conference of "Marxist agronomists," and thousands of Davydovs, selflessly devoted to him, lashed out against prosperous peasants, driving people almost to the

point of rebellion... And then came March 2, 1930.

After a delay due to flooding, on March 20 the postman brought the newspaper with Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" to Gremyachy Log. It just took one day for every household to get a look at one of the three copies of *The Hammer*, and by evening they had turned into damp, grease-stained scraps. They read it, gathered in groups, in huts, in the lanes, in back yards, at the entrances to granaries... One would read it out loud and the others would listen, afraid of missing a single word, being as quiet as they possibly could. Terrible arguments broke out all over the hamlet about the article. Everyone interpreted it in their own way, for the most part seeing in it whatever they wanted. And almost everywhere, when Nagulnov or Davydov appeared, for some reason they hurriedly passed the newspaper from hand to hand until, like a white bird flitting about the crowd, it disappeared into someone's roomy pocket.

"Now the *kolkhozes* will fall apart at the seams, like rotten clothing!" Bannik exclaimed triumphantly, the first to offer his conjecture.

The women, who had a poor understanding of the matter, thought up their own harebrained theories.

And so it went all around the hamlet:

"They're doin' away with the *kolkhozes*!"

"They'll give folks back their cows, on order of Moscow."

"The *kulaks* will be brought back and signed up for the *kolkhozes*."

"They'll give voice back to them that lost 'em."

"They'll open the Tubyansky church and hand the seed stock out to the farmers for feed."

How easy it was for people to believe that something better was coming, especially if that something better was coming from a kind tsar. Now they understood who could protect them, who it was that read all the petitions they had addressed to him, while all the local bosses – all the Davydovs and Nagulnovs – were just getting in Comrade Stalin's way as he tried to intercede on their behalf. The number of peasants entering collective farms fell sharply throughout the country. A little steam had been let off.

Afterwards they were again herded into collective farms, but however bad things might be, at least they now knew that the people's defender was sitting in the Kremlin. It was just a matter of how to get word to him...

The famine of 1933, which took millions of lives, was less than three years away.

A Country of Poets

THE ROLE OF POETS in this country has always stretched beyond the realm of literature. A poet here is a visionary, a paragon of moral – and often political – mores. Hence the popular maxim (attributed to Yevgeny Yevtushenko) – **ПОЭТ В РОССИИ БОЛЬШЕ, ЧЕМ ПОЭТ** – a poet in Russia is more than a poet. Sometimes he can also be a president, oops, a prime minister.

Vladimir Putin clearly demonstrated his poetic chops last November when meeting in Yalta with his Ukrainian counterpart, Yulia Timoshenko. When asked to comment on a parallel meeting in Kiev between Russia's two arch-enemies – Viktor Yushchenko and Mikhail Saakashvili, Putin surmised that “two presidents always have something to talk about” (**ДВАУМ ПРЕЗИДЕНТАМ ВСЕГДА ЕСТЬ О ЧЕМ ПОГОВОРИТЬ**)... Then he offered a poetic paraphrase of Pushkin, suggesting what he thought that “something” might be: **“БОЙЦЫ ВСПОМИНАЛИ МИНУВШИЕ ДНИ И БИТВЫ, ЧТО ВМЕСТЕ ПРОДУЛИ ОНИ”** (“The warriors recalled their days bygone, and all the battles they never won”). It was a clear reference to the Ossetian war that Saakashvili lost despite Yushchenko's enthusiastic moral and military support.*

Putin's poetic feat earned him kudos with the Russian press and public. In Ukraine, not so much.

Why kudos? Because Russians love rhymes, especially ones that demonstrate a knowledge of cultural touchstones. We garnish our day-to-day speech with what we call **присловья** or **прибаутки** – facetiously rhymed catch-phrases and expressions that spice up the language. These **прибаутки** often serve as perfect ice-breakers. For instance:

When a Russian unexpectedly

meets a friend in a restaurant and wants to invite him to his table, he might say, **“МИЛОСТИ ПРОШУ К НАШЕМУ ШАЛАШУ”** (“I kindly invite you to our lean-to”).

When a host matter-of-factly dumps another generous helping onto your plate, asking innocently, **“ЕЩЕ КУСОЧЕК?”** (“Another piece?”), you can jokingly reply – **“С КОРОВИЙ НОСОЧЕК”** (“just a piece as big as a cow's toe”).

When a colleague at work is dating someone without serious intent, you can sarcastically joke that **“ОН КРУТИТ ШУРЫ-МУРЫ”** (**МУРЫ** derives from the French *amour*). Or, when asked about the nature of their relationship, you can respond, **“НУ, ЛЮБОВЬ — МОРКОВЬ”** (“love is a carrot”) implying it is a superfluous, short-lived affair.

The use of these popular rhymes won't earn you the laurels of Pushkin, but you can count on kudos from your Russian friends. But wait, there's more!

When you meet a good friend, you can rhyme: **“КАКИЕ ЛЮДИ В ГОЛЛИВУДЕ!”** (literally, “What people you meet in Hollywood”), which means “Well I never,” or “Long time no see!”

When someone asks you **“НУ?”** (“So?”) you can blurt – **“БАРАНКИ ГНУ!”** (literally, “I bend *baranki*” – bagel-shaped rolls). When you knock on a friend's door and he asks: **“КТО?”** you can reply, **“ДЕД ПИХТО!”** or **“КОНЫ В ПАЛЬТО!”** (“Grampa Pikhito!” or “A horse in a coat!”).

When you don't want to reply to someone's prying remark about what comes next: **“А ПОТОМ?”** (“And then what?”), just offer the classic **присловье**, **“СУП С КОТОМ!”** (“A cat soup!”) To an annoying **“ГДЕ?”** (“Where?”) you can reply, **“В**



Караганда* (“In Karaganda”).

Many **присловья** come from the army or navy. For example, after a briefing of his **матросы** (sailors), a commander might ask, **“ВОПРОСЫ?”** To which the marines jokingly respond **“У МАТРОСОВ НЕТ ВОПРОСОВ”** (“Sailors have no questions”). When a sailor dumps a date from the shore after a bit of **шУРЫ-МУРЫ**, it is said he **поматросил и бросил** (played with her and dumped her).

Both rhymes have moved into mainstream usage and even apply to politics. To return to the Ukrainian theme, Yushchenko tried to **крутить шУРЫ-МУРЫ** with George Bush, Jr., NATO and the West. **НУ?**

Баранки гну! Bush is gone, and NATO **поматросил и бросил** Ukraine (and Georgia), telling them they will have to wait a bit for membership. Meanwhile, the **любовь-морковь** period between Yushchenko and Ukrainians has passed. After receiving just five percent of votes in Ukraine's presidential election, Yushchenko was sent packing, which, of course, will give him plenty more time to hang out with Saakashvili and reminisce about battles gone by.

* The actual line is from Alexander Pushkin's Song of Oleg the Wise (**ПЕСНЬ О ВЕЩЕМ ОЛЕГЕ**): **БОЙЦЫ ВСПОМИНАЮТ МИНУВШИЕ ДНИ И БИТВЫ, ГДЕ ВМЕСТЕ РУБИЛИСЬ ОНИ** (the warriors recall their bygone days and the battles they fought together).



The Many Faces of Yaroslavl

It is not often that a city celebrates a millennial birthday. Founded as a fortress in 1010 by Yaroslav the Wise, Yaroslavl soon rose to prominence as a commercial center. Six centuries later, in 1612, it was the center of resistance to the Polish occupation. And just 40 years prior to that, Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) took refuge here when the Mongols threatened the capital. Just 250 kilometers from Moscow, this city of 615,000 sits astride the Volga and Kotorosl rivers, and was home to Russia's first public theater, first rubber factory, and Northern Russia's first university. The city will officially celebrate its anniversary in early September, but we at *Russian Life* decided to get a jump on things and offer a colorful portrait of multifaceted Yaroslavl this spring.

City of Legends

The truth of Yaroslavl's founding has been lost in the mists of time.

There is one legend of a fearsome beast that terrorized local residents. It would attack travelers and hunters in the forest, steal children from their cradles, and scare off young girls who went to collect water in the Kotorosl and Volga Rivers. The story has it that this huge beast (a bear) had been sent by the pagan god Veles, as punishment for the locals' acceptance of Christianity in the 10th century. The locals suffered long and begged for mercy, but dared not return to their old pagan faith. Instead, they asked the young prince from Rostov to come to their aid.

According to the legend, Yaroslav arrived, fought Veles' terrible emissary and killed him with a battle axe. Then, as he stood on the high banks of the river, he looked around and saw thick forests full of game, rivers teeming with fish, and wide pastures. He ordered the

Monastery of the
Transfiguration of the
Savior. View from the
belfry onto the Church
of Archangel Michael.





founding of a city and bestowed upon it his name and seal, which depicted the defeated bear carrying a poleaxe on his shoulder.

Yet this is just one of the founding legends of Yaroslavl. According to another, the residents of a village known as Medvezhy Ugol (literally, "Bear's Den"; figuratively: "Godforsaken Hole") were pagans who worshipped the god Veles and who made their living thieving from trade caravans. Learning of this, Yaroslav the Wise decided to baptize the heathen and defend the traders. He arrived with troops and a priest. The locals unleashed upon them a huge bear and a pack of wild dogs. Scarcely taking time to think, Yaroslav dispatched the bear himself, and the dogs left

Today, at the confluence of the Kotorosl and Volga rivers, where, according to legend Yaroslav the Wise fought with the fierce emissary of a pagan god, there lives a young, orphaned bear. It was found in the forest some time ago by hunters, who then brought it to the museum. The little bear (Masha) has since grown up and now earns her keep; tourists come to see the bear, and the money from their tickets pay for Masha's feed.



him alone. The pagan villagers fell to their knees, accepting Yaroslav's superior power.

This was reputedly on August 2, the name day of the Prophet Elijah, so the prince ordered that a church be built in honor of Elijah, and in memory of his miraculous victory over the bear. Thus was founded the first Christian city on the Volga.

City of Churches

It is difficult to find a place in Yaroslavl from where you *cannot* see a church. One seems constantly surrounded by the gold, green and black cupolas of Orthodox churches, particularly in the city center.

One might think the Church of the Prophet Elijah (Церковь Ильи Пророка, pictured on the opposite page, top) was the city's oldest, but the church founded by Yaroslav had not been preserved in its original state. The current stone church with green cupolas was built in the middle of the 17th century by local artisans, who used painting and metal working techniques known only to craftsmen in Yaroslavl.

In restoring the church this century and last, scientists sought out comparable, ancient models. The paintings on the external walls have not survived the passage of time, yet the internal decorations have been completely restored. Interestingly, the frescoes of this church were never painted over, as was the case in most other Russian churches over the centuries, but merely cleaned. In addition, when depicting the life of Elijah in the frescoes, the icon painters transferred to the walls images of everyday 17th century life, making it a valuable source of historical information. One can even see images of a harvest, which is unusual, because such wealthy churches did not normally serve as canvases on which to depict simple peasant labors. Today the Church of the Prophet Elijah is a working church.

Church construction really took off in Yaroslavl in the 1600s, such that, by the start of the 1700s, the city had over 50 churches. Not all have survived to the present day, of course, but there are enough to spark serious debate over which is the city's most beautiful.

For some it is the ensemble of churches at Korovniki, which is incredible when seen from the Volga. Rent a rowboat or ask the captain of a tourist ship to slowly pass by here at dawn, and hold your

breath as the sun rises and illuminates the two red brick churches and belltower. Construction of the ensemble spanned several decades, yet the generations of artisans nonetheless managed to create a surprisingly harmonious whole. This is largely due to the symmetry of the composition. The first church, named for John Chrysostom (Ioann Zlatoust), was a summer church, while the second, smaller Church of the Vladimir Virgin was conceived as a winter church. Yet it had to be built on two floors, since it proved too difficult to heat such a tall structure. The 37-meter bell tower was built last, and it stands equidistant from the two churches. When the first light of day falls upon its imposing profile, it is easy to see why it gained the nickname "The Candle of Yaroslavl." Unfortunately, during the Soviet era the ensemble was used as a salt warehouse, and many of its unique frescoes were forever lost. The churches are in need of extensive restoration, yet their beauty is apparent even in their current, reduced condition.

Similarly, one cannot but be amazed by the tallest

of Yaroslavl's churches, the Church of John the Baptist, which has an interesting history. This was once where pagan believers gathered at dawn on the summer solstice to bathe in the Kotorosl River. With time, the pagan customs were replaced with Orthodox ones and the river ablutions were tied to the day of remembrance for John the

Baptist (now celebrated as Ivan Kupalo Day).

The 17th century spurt in church construction came about because Yaroslavl had begun to get rather rich off trade along the Volga River, so local merchants started investing large sums in the construction of churches. Each *sloboda* – a region of the city or its suburbs that focused on a specific trade or craft – competed with all the rest, seeking to build the wealthiest and most beautiful church. When the residents of Tolchkovaya *sloboda* decided to build a church after having lost several in successive fires, they resolved to build something unusual, the likes of which had never been seen in Yaroslavl.* By special permission of the tsar, two brick factories were built, in order that the hopes of the merchants, builders and simple residents could be realized.



IF THESE BRICKS COULD SPEAK

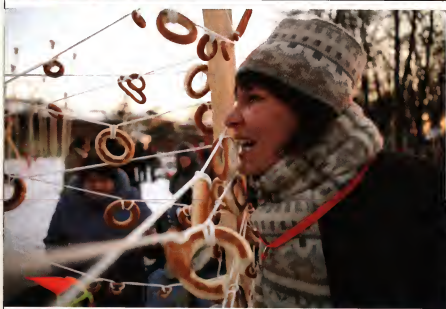
Top left: The Church of the Prophet Elijah. Above right: Decorative brickwork on the Church of John the Baptist (For full image of church, see cover of magazine).

Lower left: The brick churches at Korovniki.

Once famous across Russia for its 15 cupolas and lace-like stonework, the Church of John the Baptist has been somewhat forgotten. It is far from the city center and butts up against a rather unappealing factory. Yet it lives on as a symbol of ancient Russia, insofar as its image graces the 1000 ruble note.



* The region is named Tolchkovaya because local craftsmen treated skins with bark to improve the quality of the leather. They milled and pounded oak bark in wooden pounders (to pound – *tolch* in Russian).



The uniquely Yaroslavl style of stone architecture was fully realized in the Church of John the Baptist, which, along with its belltower, rises to a height of 45 meters. The walls of the church are decorated with distinctive Yaroslavl tiles, and the use of a variety of sizes and shapes of bricks gives the stone walls the appearance of lace. Inside, the walls are decorated with the most complete collection of biblical images of any Orthodox church in Russia. Many were lost during the Soviet era, but the restoration continues. An ancient tradition was similarly lost during the Soviet century. Time was, local residents and peasants from the surrounding regions would gather at this church on holidays. Whole families would arrive, bearing baskets of food for a day of picnicking and swimming.

City of Celebrations

The annual celebration at the Church of John the Baptist may not have survived, but Yaroslavl's love of celebration certainly did. Holidays are heartily welcomed here. Everyone takes part in *maslenitsa* – the ancient Russian holiday bidding farewell to winter. In the central square about the Church of the Prophet Elijah they cook *blini* for any and all comers, have sack races, compete to bite *baranki* (bagel-shaped rolls) off strings, ride horses, dance, and do everything to create a sense of celebration. In the evening, in the very center of the Volga River, they set fire to the scarecrow Zima, who is departing to make way for Vesna (*zima* is the Russian word for winter; *vesna* is the word for spring).

Maslenitsa takes place on the last day before the Great Lent, which (40 days later) is followed by Orthodox Easter – yet another example of the melding of pagan and Orthodox traditions. (Similarly do communities around the world associated with the Catholic Church celebrate Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday or Carnival just before Lent.)

One of the main Orthodox holidays widely celebrated in Yaroslavl is Epiphany.^{*} Each year, during the night between the 18th and 19th of January, Orthodox citizens gather on the banks of the Volga and Kotorosl in order to take part in the ritual of cleansing and blessing of the waters. Traditionally, the fiercest frosts arrive in Russia on Epiphany; if it was but -5° C before January 18, then odds are that on the

The First Millennium

- 1010** Town founded by Yaroslav the Wise
- 1071** First mentioned in Chronicle
- 1215** First stone building constructed
- 1463** Yaroslavl becomes part of Muscovy
- 1612** Town becomes temporary capital of Russia during Polish occupation
- 1750** Fyodor Volkov puts on first play
- 1870** First train from Yaroslavl to Moscow
- 1900** First electric light from local power station; First tram put into service
- 1912** Train bridge across Volga completed

eve of January 19 it will drop to minus 20°. But this does not stop anyone. They make holes in the ice in the shape of crosses, into which wooden ladders are lowered. By tradition, one must fully dunk underwater three times, and also cross oneself three times.

In the churches, priests hand out holy water gathered on this night – it is believed to have special properties, and will not become stale; it is believed that, if you sprinkle this water into the corners of your home, your family will not be visited by illness. Whole families come to jump into the waters – which are considered holy through the entire following day – in order to alleviate spiritual and physical illnesses; the strength of the waters is believed to give one a reserve of health and vigor to last the whole year.

City of Sport

Yaroslavl's northern climate means that it gets a full dose of winter as well as summer. So it is not surprising that the favorite sports here have long been hockey and the biathlon. In the city's School for Olympic Reserve Athletes, they train for short-track speed skating, yet it is the rifle-wielding cross-country biathletes who are held in highest regard amongst Yaroslavl's. In fact, the city has approved the construction of a world-class biathlon training center, which should allow Russian athletes to once again train on their native soil.

The city's Lokomotiv hockey club has thrice won the Russian championship, twice back-to-back (2001-2 and 2002-3), something no other Russian superleague squad has achieved.

**SHOOTING
FOR GOLD
Biathlon
training at
the School
of Olympic
Reserve
Athletes.**



SCENES FROM YAROSLAVL

(Opposite page, clockwise from top)

Restoration of frescoes in Tolga convent. Getting ready for an Epiphany dip. The Central Market. Biting baranki during Maslenitsa.

* Epiphany is **Крещение** in Russian. It occurs 12 days after the traditional celebration of Orthodox Christmas (January 7). In Russia, Epiphany is a celebration of the divinity taking flesh in Christ; it is the oldest Orthodox feast, but for Easter.



Slavneft refinery

City of Petrochemicals

From soon after its founding until 1937, when the Moscow-Volga Canal was completed and the city's influence waned, Yaroslavl was a crucial trading hub. In the Soviet era, it became an important manufacturing center as well.

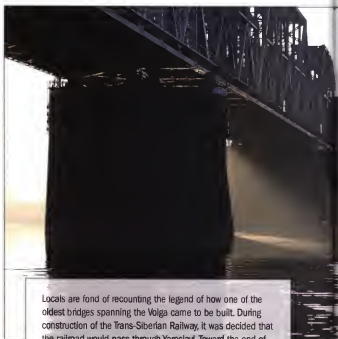
If you enter Yaroslavl from the South at night, the first thing you will likely see is the fires of Slavneft's oil refinery. The refinery receives some 14 million tons of Siberian oil and gas each year from tankers floated up the Volga, then transforms them into over 100 different petrochemicals.

There is also a large tire factory (which, by the way, sponsors a well-known soccer club, Yaroslavl Tire – Ярославский шинник) in the city. The factory was built in the early 1930s with the help of American specialists. In 1933 it was the first place in Russia to output synthetic rubber, meaning the expensive resource no longer had to be imported from abroad. Today the factory employs about 4000 and is one of Russia's largest tire producers.

City of Rivers and Bridges

It is impossible to conceive of Yaroslavl without reference to water. Wide embankments, tourist cruise ships, huge oil tankers and delicate sailboats are all common sites here. For a thousand years, floating caravans, trading ships and passenger vessels have passed the city from north to south and back again.

Summer is the best time in Yaroslavl. The heat forces locals out of their apartments and onto the rivers' beaches... the sun glints off golden cupolas... vacationers arrive in yachts... people swim in the cool waters or rent boats or water bikes to ply the river...



Locals are fond of recounting the legend of how one of the oldest bridges spanning the Volga came to be built. During construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, it was decided that the railroad would pass through Yaroslavl. Toward the end of the 19th century, a rumor started making the rounds that the tsar wanted to build a bridge across the Volga, in order to shorten the rail route. Merchants rushed to buy up every possible parcel of land where the bridge might cross the river. And when the crown came asking to buy land for the railway's construction, the merchants demanded such a high price that it was decided to move the bridge's path. Today the railway bridge (completed in 1912) makes a large jog, circumventing the merchants' overvalued property. In times past, Russians would take off their hats in respect toward the Mother Volga River as they crossed her by train – the river is a full kilometer wide at this point.

after all, some of the best views of the city are from its rivers...

The main part of the city stands on the higher right bank of the Volga River. The newer regions and the ancient Tolga Monastery are on the left bank. There is a legend about the latter's founding – about an appearance of the Virgin and a miraculous bridge of light.

This was at the very beginning of the 14th century. Trifon, the Bishop of Rostov, was returning home on the Volga via Yaroslavl. One August, Trifon stopped for the night several kilometers from the city, on the right bank of the river. That night he was awoken by a bright light from the opposite bank of the Volga. Taking his staff, the bishop went to the river and saw a pillar of light rising up from the left bank. A bridge of light spanned the river and the bishop walked across it. As he crossed, he saw, in the middle of the pillar of light, the Mother of God holding the Christ Child in her arms. The bishop fell to his knees and prayed. He then returned across the bridge of light, forgetting that he had left his staff on the other shore.

The next morning, people rowed to the site of the phenomenon, and found an icon with an image of the



Tolga
convent

Mother of God near the bishop's staff. According to the legend, a church was raised on the site within a day, and later became the main church of the Tolga Convent, located eight kilometers from ancient Yaroslavl.

The Tolga Icon of the Mother of God has always been considered a wonder working icon. According to tradition, Ivan the Terrible came to Yaroslavl and was conveyed in a wooden chair, because he was unable to walk due to an inexplicable disease. After praying to the icon, he stood up, completely cured. And, in the 17th century, when a mass plague struck Yaroslavl, the icon was taken to the city, where the disease lifted after the icon led a procession of the cross.

To this day, the icon is the city's most sacred religious artifact. The convent itself has been restored and is once again active.

The other monastery in the city, the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior, (Спасско-Преображенский монастырь) was the fortress that dated the city's founding. Throughout Russia's middle ages, monasteries were defensive outposts. This walled fortress at the confluence of the Volga and Kotorosl was intended to fend off attack from the water.

City of History

When the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior was founded in the 12th century, it enjoyed

the natural protection of the Volga's and Kotorosl's high banks, surviving countless fires and raids. Today, the complex of churches, belltowers and other monastery buildings is part of the Yaroslavl Architectural and Artistic Museum. The main

structure is the Transfiguration of the Savior Church, which dates to the 16th century (the original 12th century church burned down) and is the city's oldest stone church.

A belfry stands alongside the church. From its viewing platform (page 29) there is a spectacular panorama that takes in Yaroslavl's historic district (which in 2005 was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List). If by chance you find yourself here when a storm is brewing, don't rush back down the stairs to hide from the rain.

Instead, stay to savor the moment.

The stormclouds will rapidly fill the sky, first darkening it, then turning it a dull white. And when the downpour begins, its shroud will hide the tourist buses on the embankment, the tankers on the Volga, and the modern restaurants with their neon lights. There will remain only the living history that resides in the stone walls under the ancient bells. Of course, the monastery's original bells were lost long ago. But in 1991 the museum brought 18 ancient bells out of storage and mounted them in the tower, and today they again signal the calls to worship and celebration. **RL**

Birthday Celebrations

The city is taking advantage of the jubilee to tap into state coffers and make improvements to every sphere of life in the city. Reportedly, the state is spending over \$28 billion on renovations and new construction related to the anniversary, including everything from a new concert hall, to reinforcing river embankments, to a monument to locally born hero and first woman in space Valentina Tereshkova, to creating film documentaries, and building a new church. The main festivities for the jubilee will take place in early September.



As the US and NATO grapple with a prolonged war and deployment in Afghanistan, they find they are dealing with many of the same challenges that led to the Soviet defeat there, 21 years ago. Meanwhile, curious new Russian and post-Soviet republic footprints have appeared in the landlocked Central Asian nation.

Story and photos by Nick Allen

CHRISTMAS DAY, 2001. I am pouring Stolichnaya vodka from a rusty-capped bottle of Soviet occupation vintage, at a lunch for foreign journalists in Kabul, when I learn that my seat holds the remains of Red Army soldiers.

According to my hosts, in the wooden chest beneath me lie skeletons of two Ukrainians which have been passed from place to place as people seek a way to send them home for burial.

It is a sombre reminder of a war in which 15,000 Soviet troops and 1-2 million Afghans died before Moscow's withdrawal in February 1989, a potent addition to the rusting wrecks of tanks,

armoured carriers, trucks and jeeps that monumentally litter the routes I travel.

At the end of the decade, I am back in Afghanistan again. Far from fading with time, the Soviet and Russian legacy seems oddly more pronounced as the international community and the Western-backed government in Kabul wage war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Traces and echoes of former Soviet republics are to be found across the country, not just in roadside Red Army detritus, but also in the representation of these peoples in the conflict – from Azeri and Georgian troops serving with NATO's forces, to Uzbek and

Chechen fighters among the ranks of the insurgents. And in July 2009, the remains of six more Ukrainians were repatriated from here, their Moldovan-owned Mi-26 helicopter having been shot down by Taliban in Helmand province as the civilian crew delivered aid to the locals.

The coincidence of past and present threads of the USSR and its successor states is often unexpected, eerie and puzzling. In late 2008 I accompanied New Zealand troops on a patrol of remote hilltop ruins in the central Bamyán province. On one crest sat the rusting, olive green chassis of a ZPU anti-aircraft

gun, while on the wall of the crew's long abandoned shack a recent hand had scratched *russkie vernulis* ("the Russians have returned").

IT IS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK of NATO operations that the haphazard resurrection of a peculiar post-Soviet presence is most apparent. More than 500 troops from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania serve alongside British and American units, as their governments turn their backs on the past and show proud commitment to the western military alliance.

"For us it's extremely important to work with the UK and U.S.," said Major Janno Märk, commander of the 140-man Estonian contingent in Helmand province in the summer of 2009. "Because the United States supported us during the Russian occupation (of

Estonia) we got our independence in 1991, so it's important to contribute something back and keep those good relations. But if we mention Afghanistan back home, it gets associated with the Russian occupation here and that's really unpopular in Estonia."

Reflecting the contradictions of the times, the contingent's commander in 2008 once fought in Afghanistan as a Soviet conscript. I learn this as I chat with Major Märk in a small pine sauna built by the troops, an incongruous slice of Estonia in the British-run Camp Bastion.

Later, in a nearby dining tent, two Russian civil aviation pilots tell me how they fly cargo to smaller British outposts in the desert, being swiftly rerouted by air controllers if there is any trouble in the drop zone.

"How is it down there? Are there fire fights and ambushes and stuff? It all looks so peaceful from above," one pilot asks, genuinely oblivious to the slaughter unfolding on the ground.

On the larger U.S. bases, the barbers, massage salons and general stores are staffed mainly by Russian-speaking Kyrgyz, recruited in Bishkek by contracting firms that service NATO. And by store exits there is usually a table covered with Soviet military paraphernalia, souvenirs bearing Lenin's visage, badges, old ruble banknotes and *ushanka* fur hats.

And at the former Soviet airbase at Bagram, located north of Kabul, U.S. military traffic was halted in 2003 when two soldiers spotted what appeared to be a mine buried at the roadside. Subsequent excavation by ordnance experts revealed the object to be an unopened can of Russian tuna fish.

SPENDING \$20 on a belt with a hammer and sickle buckle is one thing, but, in the minds of most foreign soldiers, there is a clear difference between them and the Soviet forces that once fought on this soil. The latter are described as invading aggressors, distinguished by

Left: Russian weapons are still the mainstay of both the Afghan government and insurgent forces. Below: A vintage Volga parked in the marketplace in Gardez, Pakhtiya province.



FIRST CONTACT: The first Russian embassy to visit Afghanistan was under Ivan III, in 1465. It visited the city of Herat and arrived with "an expression of love and a desire for friendship" and was "met honorably" by the ruler of Herat, Abu Said. In 1490, ambassadors from Herat made a return visit to Moscow. [Alexander Naumov, "The Russian Diaspora in Afghanistan," *Russkymiru* journal, 2009]



carpet bombing of villages and ruthless suppression of resistance, while NATO are the "good guys," here to build infrastructure and democracy.

Nevertheless, the distinction is often lost on ordinary and usually illiterate Afghans. They don't have the luxury of books or television, historical and political perspectives and debates. And they still live in fear of their families, homes and crops becoming "collateral damage." To many Afghans, the worth of any foreign troops, now as then, is measured by the goodies that can be gotten from them.

"The Russians brought much more food (than NATO), tea, matches, oil, salt and sugar, and they still couldn't satisfy people and got kicked out," said Mohammad, an interpreter for Norwegian troops in the northwestern Faryab province, on the border with Turkmenistan. "I think it's not possible to catch the heart of the Afghan people – for 30 years the Afghans have been taught to fight, kill, smuggle and rob."

What those western minds – and surely Soviet ones before them – find hard to appreciate is that, for Afghan tribes and communities, changing sides and allegiance is not personal; it's just

business. It is a self-preservation technique honed over decades of privation and misery.

"They are opportunists, they grow up like that to survive," a Danish captain in Helmand says after an aid drop at a local school turns into a riot. "You know they are cooperating because it's viable, but if something better comes along, they can just switch."

A U.S. Special Forces operative who served near the western city of Herat was amazed to hear locals saying they preferred the Russians because they gave them more rice and basic products.

"I said, 'But didn't they kill you?' And they said 'Yes, but only if you opposed them.' They told me they expected the Americans to leave before long and then someone else would come, like the Russians again, or maybe the British," he said, struggling to get his head around this casual lumping of all foreigners, Russians included, into one pile. "It's almost as if this country needs to be invaded by someone, that it can't sustain itself otherwise."

This coalescent blurring of foreigners' faces lends itself to the mullahs, as they rally Afghan farm boys to the Taliban cause, preaching the same spirit

of jihad, or Holy War, that led the *mujahedin* to victory against the Soviets.

In eastern Afghanistan the modern resistance is led by *mujahedin* warrior Jalaluddin Haqqani. This former ally of the U.S. against the Soviets served in the Taliban government before al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. He also headed the overall Taliban forces when the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom began in Afghanistan in October that year.

American hopes of winning over Haqqani as a splinter faction leader against the rest of the Taliban quickly evaporated. During a trip to Pakistan, Haqqani told reporters: "We will retreat to the mountains and begin a long guerrilla war to reclaim our pure land from infidels and free our country like we did against the Soviets."

DIFFERENT WARS, SAME PROBLEMS

The local scene as viewed through the screen of a U.S. Humvee in Khost province (near the setting for the Russian film, *The Ninth Platoon*). Above right: The inscription "The Russians Returned," which the author found in a hut beneath a gun chassis, Bamyan province. Bottom right: Soviet wrecks, Bamyan town.

TODAY THE INTERNATIONAL forces face many of the same problems Soviet troops did in the 1980s, not the least being how to get close to the Afghans without becoming too vulnerable.

"To protect the lives of people, we wrap them in a 20-ton armoured vehicle. It'll protect you from a blast, but it prevents you from talking directly to people," a Canadian captain in Kandahar said. "And the helmet, flak jacket, ballistic eyewear, mouthpiece and wire running to our ear, all the kit makes us look like starship troopers, worlds apart from the people we are talking to. How do you be intimate enough without being too intimate?"

The late former Soviet soldier and Russian journalist Artem Borovik wrote in his 1990 book, *The Hidden War*: "If you want to learn about a strange country, experienced travellers say, disappear into it. But in Afghanistan we couldn't even manage to do that. During the nine years of war we were constantly

separated from the country by eight centimetres of bullet-proof glass, through which we stared in fear from inside our armoured carriers."

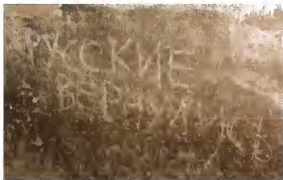
With no quick fix in sight for Afghanistan, American soldiers I spoke

everybody. The Russians were much more brutal than us and they still could not pull it off."

Russkie vernulis. It's not a formal return, of course. Scars of the 1979-89 involvement run so deep that no government in Moscow would dare commit troops again to these mountains and deserts. But the Kremlin in recent years has sent large amounts of weapons and supplies to the Kabul government, mindful that if the Taliban return to power, the radical Islamist movement could destabilize the Central Asian states and threaten Russia's underbelly.

While there is little love lost between Russia and NATO in the post-Cold War era, Moscow's ambassador to the alliance, Dmitry Rogozin, in 2009 emphasized his country's interest in the suppression of the Taliban.

"I can responsibly say that, in the event of NATO's defeat in Afghanistan, fundamentalists who are inspired by this





Estonian troops flex their muscles for NATO. Opposite page: Friendship Bridge, where the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February 1989.

victory will set their eyes on the North. First they will hit Tajikistan, then they will try to break into Uzbekistan... If things turn out badly, in about 10 years our boys will have to fight well-armed and well-organized Islamists somewhere in Kazakhstan," Rogozin said.

In 2002, Russia's Defense Ministry signed a contract with Afghanistan to provide military-technical assistance, delivering motor vehicles, fuel and lubricants, communication equipment, truck-mounted repair workshops, automobile and armor equipment, and spare parts. Before the shipments were suspended in 2005, ostensibly to avoid "duplication" of U.S. aid, this military-technical assistance exceeded \$200 million. More goods were sent after 2007.

"Russia Aid to Afghanistan" read the stenciled words on the door of a ZiL communications truck I saw parked at an Afghan army base. And, as during

the jihad, Russian-made weapons are the mainstay of the arsenals of both the insurgents and the Afghan government forces.

Meanwhile, food aid donations continue to arrive from Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry, which in 2009 was to have supplied 23,000 tons of flour and cargo vehicles to Afghanistan. Aid wagons arrive via Uzbekistan in the Afghan port of Hairaton, a name that for many former Soviet soldiers is synonymous with defeat.

Hairaton is where the last Soviet troops in Afghanistan withdrew via the giant Friendship Bridge across the River Amu Darya on February 15, 1989. The last soldier to cross was General Boris Gromov, commander of the 40th Army, who recalled the day in his 1994 book *Limited Contingent*:

I glanced at my watch and gave the order, "Start the engines!" The boys made a real effort, everyone moved off in unison, which rarely happens, and the whole col-

umn drove off past me. There were tears in many of their eyes, and not from the wind either.

I waited a while and at exactly 0945 the wheels of my carrier started to move along the last few hundred meters of Afghan soil before drawing up to the bridge. Some of our border guards were sitting in trenches on the slight bend there and as we passed I waved and shouted, "Good luck, and remember there are no more of us left in Afghanistan!"

There was no one on the bridge itself, which was absolutely empty. But on the Soviet side in Termez a throng of people was waiting to meet us, including relatives of fallen soldiers and officers. Despite having received official death notices and holding funerals for their loved ones, some still bore out hopes that they might now appear.

So that no one got hurt by accident I gave the order to drive as slowly as possible across the bridge. On the one hand I still remember today how the crowd met and congratulated us with hugs and kisses, and threw flowers before the tracks of the vehicles. But I also

*remember how not one single boss in Moscow had thought to organize an official reception for the 40th Army. This attempt to gloss over our withdrawal from Afghanistan was just another example of the tactlessness of those sitting in the Kremlin. It seemed to me they wanted to casually heap all the mistakes of their predecessors and Gorbachev's crimes onto us, as if to say there's no need to greet those who survived Afghanistan because it's not the kind of war you want to remember anyway.**

Twenty years and one month later, Lt. Kadyr, the small, moustachioed head of the Afghan Border Police's local anti-smuggling unit, leads me onto the bridge, around the bend where the Soviet guards sat in their trenches, past a large portrait of President Hamid Karzai and a sign in Russian saying "Welcome to Afghanistan." As on that February morning in 1989, it is completely empty ahead of us and I can almost hear the groaning of Gromov's carrier as it makes that final journey.

I ask the lieutenant if he speaks Russian. His face cracks in a big smile as he tells me of four happy years spent as an Afghan army cadet in Moscow, Vladimir and Sochi during the 1980s.

"I would like to travel the world, but I'm stuck here," he says sadly as we walk off the bridge. "What is it that we have in Afghanistan that everyone seems to want, and why does everything get destroyed all the time?"

AFGHANISTAN'S LOCATION on East-West trade routes, wedged between former empires is a large part of the explanation. The "Great Game" that Russia played against the British in and around Afghanistan in the nineteenth century was revived in the post-9/11 world. The recent negotiation of NATO overflight rights in Russia is a case in point.

In 2008, as the Taliban encroached on U.S. military supply routes into Afghanistan from Pakistan, the Khyber Pass supply route became untenable. The most viable alternative supply route was by air, over Russia.

About this same time, coincidentally, Kyrgyzstan received a two-billion-dollar Russian "aid package." Shortly afterward, the Central Asian state announced it would terminate U.S. use of its territory and air space as a supply route to Afghanistan for personnel, weapons and supplies. Washington was forced to conclude agreements for an alternate Russian route. This concord, Moscow stressed, was contingent on respect for Russian security concerns, namely opposition to Georgia and Ukraine's inclusion in NATO. The issue also strengthened Kremlin objections to a U.S. missile shield in Europe, plans for which were subsequently dropped by the Obama administration.



Prior to all this, Russia's then ambassador to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, liked to comment dardly that NATO was making the same mistakes as the Soviets in Afghanistan, while declining to elaborate. But in 2008, at a session of the Russia-NATO council in Brussels, he urged the alliance to change its tactics and strategy in Afghanistan. Negligence of the Afghans' national, religious and cultural traditions was a grave error, the diplomat warned. "If things carry on like this, it will be a complete defeat, military and political, and when this will happen is only a question of time," Kabulov concluded.

AMONG THE GEOPOLITICAL power plays, observers in Afghanistan continually run up against the relics and reminders of the Soviet past. These can be the "micronayon" districts in Kabul, where the tatty, five-story "Khrush-

chevka" apartment blocks are still some of the city's most expensive accommodations. Or the numerous Afghan police and army officers who speak fluent Russian and drift into dreamy nostalgia as they recall drinking vodka and chasing girls in the Crimea. Or the documentaries about Red Army deserters who stayed behind in 1989, went native, adopted Islam and mastered Dari or Pashtu, grew full beards, browned under the Afghan sun and sired children with no inkling of Dad's origins in Murmansk or Kiev.

The scars of this period's violence still run deep for Afghans and former Soviet combatants alike. But for the Estonian commander who served as a paratrooper in Kandahar in 1986-87, returning to Afghanistan under NATO offered a curious balm.

"After serving there during the Soviet campaigns, the nightmares remained for years," he wrote in an email, requesting not to be named. "After being there again, things have kind of clicked into place in a good sense. Now, some dreams haunt, but in general, my soul is at peace."

Like the six ill-fated Ukrainian airmen, Russian helicopter pilot Sergei delivers humanitarian aid for the United Nations. He also served in Afghanistan two decades ago as a military pilot, and was surprised during recent assignments to meet many Afghans who were genuinely happy to make his acquaintance.

"In Mazar-e-Sharif, people reacted excellently to me, without regard to what happened in the past – they hear Russian and even invite you to their homes for dinner," he said, sitting at a coffee house at Kandahar Airfield and chatting with the hairdressers from Bishkek.

He laughs when I ask if he ever recognizes his surroundings from his active service.

"When I left in 1987, I wanted to come back someday and see the place again, see what became of it. Nothing has changed here, it's the same mountains, the same heat, the same dust. And they're still fighting." RL

* Translated from Boris Gromov, *Ограниченный контингент* [The Limited Contingent], Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1994.

The Captain Has Chosen His Course

The Russian National Orchestra Turns 20

Last September, the capital's classical music season began with an unprecedented event by Moscow (and perhaps even international) standards. It was the RNO Festival at the Bolshoi, whose star performer was not a conductor or a soloist, but an orchestra. Over seven nights, one of Russia's finest orchestras performed seven different programs under the baton of its founder, Mikhail Pletnev. The featured composer was Tchaikovsky, and the festival included a number of his works, but there was also Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, and many other composers.

According to renowned music critic Yulia Benderova, "the RNO demonstrated variety, an incomparable subtlety, and the lush essence of orchestral mastery."

The festival was not merely a prologue to the orchestra's 20th anniversary in 2010; it was also the RNO's first performance in its new status: shortly before the festival began, the famously private orchestra had attained institutional status, permitting its players guaranteed salaries as

employees of a state body, like every other major orchestra in Russia and Europe. And although the New Stage of the Bolshoi Theater, where the festival was held,* is not acoustically flawless, it is rather symbolic that these concerts took place on the country's main stage.

"In my opinion, the festival was rather remarkable," said Mikhail Pletnev in an interview with *Russian Life*. "I feel the orchestra successfully demonstrated that its stature and its reputation are justified. If I had not

The Russian National Orchestra (RNO), which many consider to be Russia's finest symphony orchestra, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. But it is not resting on its laurels. The orchestra continues to perform actively both at home and abroad, to release new recordings, and, in general, to overcome difficulties that might sink a lesser organization.

* The main stage is still under reconstruction, see *Russian Life*, Nov/Dec 2009.



Mikhail Pletnev



In concert at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Concert Hall

come down with a cold toward the end of the festival, everything would have been perfect. The program had plenty of new things for the orchestra... We had never before played Schuman's Second Symphony or Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. There has perhaps never been a festival like this, where the orchestra plays a new and difficult program every day; we will take this into consideration with the next festival."

THE RNO IS THE SINGULAR Moscow orchestra to be included in *Gramophone* magazine's listing of the Top 20 Orchestras in the World. It is an unbelievable achievement for an orchestra that was only founded in 1990 – the other orchestras in the Top 20 have been around for many decades or even centuries. The RNO was the first-ever Russian orchestra to visit the Vatican and, later, Israel, and western reviewers heap it with accolades: "a living symbol of the best in Russian art"; "one of the world's best"; "the Rolls-Royce of orchestras"; "as perfect as one could hope for"; "the most important cultural story of our time."

In the mid-1990s, when Moscow orchestras stopped traveling to the provinces for lack of state support, the RNO began its annual Volga Tour, performing for the residents of Samara, Ulyanovsk, Volgograd, Nizhny Novgorod, Cheboksary and Yaroslavl. The RNO's first Volga tour, in 1996, seemed like a gamble, but later it became not merely part of the orchestra's image, but an ideal way to convey the musical arts to regions far from the capital.

Six years ago, this journalist was fortunate enough to travel with the RNO and Pletnev on one of its Volga tours, floating from Saratov to Kazan on board the *Fyodor Shalyapin*. Countless colorful episodes flood

the memory: the ping-pong tournament of principal musicians, Pletnev practicing on the ship's piano, outdoor games on the deck that included both orchestra members and guests. Observing the orchestra from the inside allowed one to witness the many unseen threads that bound the musicians one to another, so that when they assembled on stage they formed a deeply integrated ensemble.

Over the course of its 20 years performing, the orchestra has collaborated with the world's leading performers: Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Kent Nagano, Mstislav Rostropovich, Paavo Berglund, Martha Argerich, Gidon Kremer, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Vadim Repin, Yevgeny Kisin, Maxim Vengerov, James Galway, Dave Brubeck, Nikolaj Znaider, Gil Shaham, Julia Fischer, Joshua Bell, Alexei Lyubimov, Yevgeny Svetlanov, and the list goes on and on. At the recent festival, the RNO performed with clarinetist Michael Collins, soprano Simone Kermes, violinist Sergei Krylov, pianists Stephen Hough and Conrad Tao, and many others.



The RNO Festival opened, not accidentally, with Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. It was the first piece the orchestra recorded back in 1991, and the respected journal *Gramophone* called this recording the best Tchaikovsky's Sixth in history. To date, the RNO has released some 60 recordings and many of them have received prestigious awards. In 2004, the RNO became the first (and still only) Russian orchestra to win a Grammy, the recording industry's highest honor. Just in the past half-year, two RNO discs (*Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 15, conducted by Mikhail Pletnev) were deemed "Best Recording of the Month" by *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*, respectively.

The orchestra continues to record, even though Pletnev says he doesn't need any more recordings: "The people who need them are those who want to hear the orchestra play in person, but are not able to. Today, even as orchestral recordings are being done less and less, we have several big recording projects. Three years ago, we recorded all of Beethoven's symphonies and piano concertos [for Deutsche Grammophon]. Christian Gansch [conductor of the piano concertos] is a very fine musician, even though he is not a big name in conducting. But I didn't need a conductor who

would bring his own conceptions to this; I needed a conductor who would seek to do what I wanted, both in concert and in the recordings. This summer [2009] we recorded Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* [for Ondine Records]. We are continuing to record Shostakovich's symphonies [for PentaTone Classics]. And we are being asked to once again record all of Tchaikovsky's symphonies. In 1996 we recorded them for Deutsche Grammophon; this is a different company [PentaTone] and the orchestra sounds different, so it will be a different recording."

Among Russian orchestras, the RNO is one of the more active touring ensembles, with a major international tour every year. It is through such touring that it has gained the impressive international following that has set it apart from other Russian orchestras. Indeed, the RNO has come to be called nothing less than "the calling card for modern Russian classical music."

THE RNO'S FOUNDER, artistic director and principal conductor, Mikhail Pletnev, spends most of his time with the orchestra, thanks to which he has all but abandoned his career as a pianist, which began after he was Gold Medal and First Prize winner of the 1978 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition,





Maxim Rubtsov



Alexander Gottgelf

when he was only 21. Needless to say, this has been a loss to lovers of piano music.* At present, Pletnev shows no immediate signs of returning to the piano concert circuit.

"How can one play on bad pianos?" Pletnev asked. "You walk up to a piano and merely touch the keyboard and instantly all you want to do is leave. Perhaps there are good pianos to be found somewhere, but it is difficult... It's difficult to simply play the piano now; you have to tour, which means you have to ferry your piano to every new city... And the main thing is that there is no such piano [to survive such transport], it can't be found."

But, of course, there is more to it than this. Pletnev is committed to spending much of the year with the RNO. And this is counter to the modern norm, where the head of the orchestra usually spends no more than two to four months a year with his ensemble. Pletnev conducts most of the RNO's concerts, and does not hide the fact that he is standing on principle by doing so.

"There have arisen new sorts of relationships between conductors and orchestras," Pletnev said. "But here [in Russia] we are a bit old fashioned, and I feel that it is better. When there was the NBC Orchestra, you could hear the hand of Toscanini in it; when Mravinsky led the Leningrad Philharmonic, you could hear in the orchestra's sound who was in charge. When conductors appear rarely on the podium, when they switch out every four years, there will not be any such identification of conductor and orchestra. But of course there are orchestras, like the Vienna Philharmonic, which have decided to go their own way, to exist without a principal conductor..."

Such a strategy is clearly not for Russia. It may be that the names of Europe's most famous orchestras – the Vienna Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw or the Leipzig Gewandhaus – speak for themselves. But within Russia the best orchestras are signified primarily by the last name of their principal conductor. The Bolshoi Symphonic is known as the orchestra of Vladimir Fedoseyev; the Petersburg Philharmonic is the province of Yuri Temirkanov; and the Russian National is the orchestra of Mikhail Pletnev.

The formula: "when we say RNO, we mean Pletnev; when we say Pletnev, we mean the RNO" is as true for this orchestra as for any other. But it was not always thus. Ten years ago, in 1999, on the eve of the RNO's 10th anniversary, Pletnev said he wanted to spend more time composing and return to his piano career. He handed the post of principal conductor to Vladimir Spivakov, while remaining with the RNO as an honorary conductor. But then, three years later, the RNO announced they would not renew Spivakov's contract, and he abruptly quit. Pletnev returned, yet

not as the singular principal conductor, but as the head of a "Conductor's Collegium," which included Kent Nagano, Paavo Berglund, and a handful of others.

The ideological foundation of the Collegium was explained by the orchestra's general director at the time, Sergei Markov: "In Russia to this point orchestras have been known by the names of their principal conductors. In other countries, they parted ways with this custom after Karajan.* It is time for us to dispense with this as well. The time of lone titans has passed into history... An orchestra is a reflection of society, a voice of its era. Today, attempts to 'play like Karajan' come across as a farce... Pletnev does not suffer from the 'professional illness' of the principal conductor – jealousy of others' authority or success, or others' creative style or interpretations."

The idea of a Collegium seemed to be as visionary as the RNO's founding in 1990, and the model was subsequently adopted by other orchestras around the world. (Kent Nagano, one of the brightest foreign stars in the Collegium, only conducted twice in Moscow during this period, yet he did conduct the orchestra on tour and led three powerful RNO recordings, one of which won the Grammy.) Yet the creation of the Collegium also coincided with one of the most dramatic moments in the orchestra's history. When Spivakov left the RNO, he took with him 30 musicians to form the National Philharmonic of Russia (NPR). History was repeating itself. Back when the RNO got its start, Pletnev invited into the orchestra musicians from other Moscow orchestras. And before that, in the early 1970s, Evgeny Svetlanov lured away musicians from the Moscow Philharmonic to his State Academic Symphony Orchestra.

In fact, Pletnev said the defection worked to the betterment of the orchestra: overnight it became younger by half, yet sounded better than ever. "I am very satisfied," Pletnev said last fall. "The orchestra's potential is vast. Truly fantastic young people have joined us; they play superbly and have a huge appetite for work. The orchestra is playing wonderfully; the young musicians work very hard."

ALONG WITH A YOUNGER PROFILE, the orchestra made another important acquisition a few years later, in 2003: Vladimir Jurowski began to regularly conduct the RNO. Born in Moscow and educated in Europe, Jurowski is principal conductor (since 2007) of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director of the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and leads orchestras on the finest stages around the world. His work with the RNO has been highly praised, and he has introduced more 20th century music into the orchestra's repertoire, including Zemlinsky, Debussy, Adams and others. None of the RNO concerts in Moscow that he conducted in recent years was

forgettable. Jurowski has also led the orchestra on several tours, and was appointed the RNO's first ever Principal Guest Conductor in 2006.

Meanwhile, the first few years of the new century were a difficult time for Russian orchestras to gain funding. The state was slowly becoming more solvent and had begun to hand out presidential grants to musical organizations, but selectively so. Seven such grants were handed out in 2002, including to the Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatories, the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theaters, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, the Bolshoi Symphonic Orchestra and Evgeny Svetlanov's State Orchestra.



The RNO was in a strange situation. Recognized as one of Russia's leading cultural ambassadors, it was not receiving domestic support on a par with relatively unknown orchestras. In such a situation, one ought to expect at least *some* state support for the orchestra. (In the United States nearly all leading orchestras receive government grants at the federal, state and local level.) In fact, the Ministry of Culture officially pledged financial support to the RNO in 2003, yet, over the next three years, delivered but a third of what it had promised. Interviewed in 2007, Pletnev did not hide his resentment:

"Having arisen 15 years ago, at a time when the state was incapable of offering anything in the cultural sphere, we demonstrated how an orchestra can perform in Russia. At that most difficult time, we stayed afloat, thinking that at least they would thank us and encourage us. Instead, I began to read in the press that

* Herbert von Karajan, who led the Berlin Philharmonic for 35 years (1955-1989) and became the most famous and most recorded conductor of all time.

a non-state orchestra had no right to be called 'national,' that this was a private racket, supported by American spies. That was the accepted journalistic approach 15 years ago. I lead the orchestra, but I cannot support it financially. And the question of my employment could become an issue this year. I am not inclined to force myself on anyone, to go begging; if that becomes necessary, I would rather work outside Russia. It is especially absurd against this background to consider accepting any sort of prize: why do I need that sort of thing, if they don't let me work and if they express no interest?"

This interview took place just four months before Pletnev was awarded a Presidential Prize – one of the highest honors bestowed on public figures.* As Pletnev related it, he learned just one day before the prize ceremony that the RNO had been stricken from the list of organizations to receive state grants (smaller and less prestigious than presidential grants), and so he asked Putin what sense there was in awarding him such a prize, given this situation. The gambit paid off, and the state grant came through, but it was far from sufficient to sustain the work of the orchestra. And when, three months later, Pletnev gave his final performance as a pianist in Russia, many worried that he might emigrate, as he certainly had plenty of offers from abroad.

THANKFULLY, PLETNEV DID NOT emigrate and has no plans to do so. During just the first four months of the present concert season, he led nearly 15 concerts in Moscow. Yet he does not hide his criticism of Russian reality: "In Russia, whenever people do something seriously, it is always 'fate' or their 'mission.'"



BRASS RESET BUTTON In the RNO's latest Russian-American artistic collaboration, brass quintets of The United States Army Band and the Russian National Orchestra will present concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the official commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, from April 24 to May 13, 2010. For details about travel to Russia and participation in events honoring veterans of the war, including concerts of the two brass quintets with the Russian Army Band and the Russian National Orchestra, contact Mir Corporation at 800-424-7289 or www.mircorp.com

Everything good that is done here, as a rule, is done despite circumstances. That's just the kind of place it is... it is always difficult in Russia, there is always a hindrance, in every era. In the Soviet era, it was impossible to be creative – Shostakovich and Prokofiev both had difficulties... Now our problems are different, but they still exist. Everything has been commercialized, including classical music. It does not have huge significance in proportion to society as a whole, yet there are people who live here who need this breath of fresh air, this comfort, as it were. Since we are here, we try to provide them with that."

The orchestra can now be more certain about its future. At the end of last summer, it was announced that the RNO had been given the status of a Federal Cultural Institution (the Russian abbreviation is GUK), a designation that is largely ceremonial and which allows the RNO to receive state support while maintaining its independence. Part of this is salaries for musicians. Not that new positions and salaries were created for the RNO's musicians. Instead, the RNO has taken the place of the Symphonic Orchestra of Russia, whose positions on the state rolls have been given to the RNO. The Symphonic Orchestra was founded and led by Veronika Dudarova until her recent death. Her Moscow orchestra was a clear "outsider" and its passing will scarcely be noticed, except by those musicians who were in its employ. Originally, there was some talk about an open competition between musicians from the two orchestras for the positions, but it never took place; last fall, Pletnev indicated that just one Dudarova musician had been invited to join the RNO.

Thus did one orchestra survive at the expense of another, but in this "winner take all" instance, it was entirely justified, insofar as the RNO truly is one of Russia's finest. Back when the change of status was only first being discussed, Pletnev was concerned: "The orchestra has received the status of a state organization, and that will impose upon us certain conditions."

Later, in his interview with *Russian Life*, Pletnev was surprised to hear he had voiced these words. "Did I really say that? I have no idea what I meant; I don't recall. The orchestra plays just the same as it did before. I don't hear any difference in its sound."

What has changed for the orchestra, Pletnev said, is the world in which it must exist. "Russia is a rather specific country," Pletnev said. "It is impossible for an orchestra to exist in Russia the way orchestras exist in the rest of the world. We have to work within the boundaries that exist here. It is a miracle that we ignored them for so long. The more time has gone by, the more significantly the political situation in the country has changed. That which was possible 20 years ago does not work at present. But that is not even the main thing. The main thing is how does the orchestra

* The 2007 award was "For Merits before the Fatherland, Third Degree"; in 2006, he received the State Prize of the Russian Federation.

play, what sort of creative spirit does it have, what are its artistic achievements?"

On that score, Russia's leading music critic, Pyotr Pospelov, can only agree with Pletnev. Pospelov considers the RNO to be one of the country's best. "An orchestra's performance level directly depends on how painstaking has been the preparation of its program," Pospelov said. "Today, the young musicians have become so well assimilated into the orchestra that Pletnev barely has to say a thing to them; his glance alone is sufficient."

The RNO's multinational support has been steadfast throughout this period of change in Russia. The orchestra counts among its supporters the Mikhail Prokhorov Foundation, Gordon Getty, Charles Simonyi, Prince Michael of Kent Foundation, Lord Jacob Rothschild, Tatiana and Gerret Copeland, Athena Blackburn, Mouli and Stacy Cohen, and Marianne Wyman, among others. Now, like orchestras in Europe and the U.S., the RNO qualifies for both state and private philanthropic support.

Though Pletnev continues to conduct the majority of concerts, many guests have been invited to conduct the RNO, and recent and upcoming appearances include Semyon Bychkov, Patrick Summers, Claus Peter Flor, Jose Serebrier, Ingo Metzmacher, Kent Nagano, and the up-and-coming conductors Vasily Petrenko and Carlo Ponti. Ponti will conduct the RNO this May in a historic concert at the Vatican celebrating the meeting of the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox faiths in the presence of Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Kirill the First.

At the same time, Vladimir Jurowski's increasing international obligations have caused a scaling back of his appearances in Moscow, to the point he no longer has sufficient time to be the RNO's Principal Guest Conductor. Still, he has announced his intention to continue his work with the RNO.

Jurowski recently conducted the RNO in a brilliant program around the theme of Faust, including fragments from Alfred Schnittke's opera *The History of Doctor Johann Faust*. One can hope that, absent regular appearances by Jurowski, the RNO will not become less flexible, for this is one of its finest qualities. Thus, one of its most successful performances last season was its performance of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, under the direction of Mark Elder. It was almost impossible to recognize the orchestra, which played as if they were born to perform Mahler and had forgotten their more delicate style – one more attuned to the works of Schubert or Tchaikovsky.

Pletnev says the RNO will continue to make creative program choices. "We of course take lots of Russian music abroad, but that is not all," Pletnev said. "We have played the poems of Liszt, the symphonies of Beethoven, as well as Brahms. But tour organizers

expect programs that, in their estimation, will bring in sufficiently large crowds. Therefore, all things favor a simplified repertoire, although we sometimes manage to slip into the program something less well-known. In Italy we performed Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead* and Scriabin's *Poeme d'extase*, as well as Tchaikovsky's Third Suite, and we have frequently performed Glazunov's Sixth Symphony, which is completely unknown everywhere. So the boundaries of our repertoire are widening. Meanwhile, lots of orchestras travel about and play merely Rachmaninov's Second Concerto and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. In Moscow, meanwhile, we are our own producers, and we perform whatever we like."

THUS DOES THE RNO GREET its 20th anniversary.

Started from nothing by Mikhail Pletnev – previously known mostly as a pianist and composer and now acknowledged as one of the leading conductors of our time – the RNO has become one of the world's most



remarkable ensembles. As it demonstrated with its festival last September – in a single concert taking on the mantle of a chamber orchestra to perform Mozart's *Gran Partita*, then transforming back into a full orchestra in the Russian style to play Scriabin's *Poeme d'extase* and a horn concerto by Gliere – it has amazing range. What is more, the RNO has astounding soloists including Russia's finest trumpeter, Vladislav Lavrik, the miraculous flutist Maxim Rubtsov, cellist Alexander Gottgelf, concertmaster Alexei Bruni, and concertmistress Tatiana Porshneva.

Bruni, for his part, has been with the RNO since its creation, and may know it better than anyone save Pletnev. "Like a fine ship's captain," Bruni said, "Pletnev always has the ability to examine a situation rather coolly and then choose the safest course."

One can only hope that this ability will help chart the RNO's course for at least the next 20 years of its remarkable journey. RL

Beneath Kremlin Walls



'Twas ever thus, alas. Some people create masterpieces, only for others to disfigure them. But at some point a third party appeared in this process: restorers, or specialists who return the original beauty to works of art that have suffered at the hands of people and time.

The history of the Russian restoration movement began in the Moscow Kremlin. In 1783, the wise decision was taken to restore the southern wall of the fortress, which had been dismantled to make way for a palace that was never built. And not just to restore it any old how, but rather to its "original form."

Map of the Kremlin at the time of Boris Godunov, who ruled from 1598-1605.

By Alexander Mozhayev

In recent years, the Kremlin has seen restoration and research work on an unprecedented scale. Such work has produced sensational results and restored the original appearance of a large number of outstanding works from the Russian middle ages. It might seem that the Kremlin's world-famous – even proverbial – architecture had been studied exhaustively. But because the Kremlin was a “forbidden city” for 70 years, its most important treasures have remained *terra incognita* for several generations of historians.

The Soviet government moved into the Kremlin in 1918. It remained closed to visitors from the 1930s until the 1960s, and to serious restoration and archeological research for much longer. Only in 1999 did experts begin to study one of the most important constructions in the history of ancient Russian architecture: the Grand Prince's Palace (1499-1508).

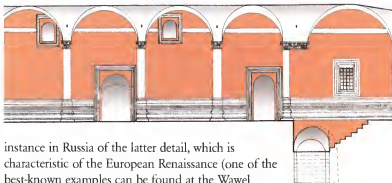
That same year, research work began on another, even more ancient building, known as the Underground Chambers of the Treasury Court. Also studied and restored were the Patriarch's Palace and the Poteschny Palace, the richest civilian buildings in 17th-century Russia. Continuing restoration work on the Cathedral of the Annunciation has thrown light on the very early history of this wonderful building.

All of these efforts have been carried out by the highly qualified specialists of the Central Scientific Restoration Project Workshops. The discoveries made during these works have turned scholarly knowledge of the history of the Kremlin – and the history of Russian architecture as a whole – on its head.

The Grand Prince's Bedchambers

Construction work on the stone Grand Prince's Palace was begun in 1499, led by the Italian architect Aloisio da Caresano. The palace comprised a chain of numerous basements that were used for housekeeping directly below state rooms and living quarters. The buildings were connected by open passageways, and had numerous stone porches. These were decorated both on the inside and outside by carved stonework, gilded in places, in the style of the early Renaissance. Most of the ancient wooden palace was dismantled in the 1830s. Only a three-storey building – in the vaults of which a new palace had been built for Tsar Mikhail Romanov in the 17th century – survived. The ancient part of the building was restored many times, and until recently the precise extent to which it had been preserved remained unclear.

Research in the 1990s established that the three-storey space was the surviving Bedchambers – in other words, the prince's living quarters – and that the construction work was indeed Italian, with clear traces of Renaissance architecture, from the open arcades and terracotta decor of the façades to the wooden coffered ceilings in the living rooms. It provides the first known



Designer's rendition of the Renaissance-style galleries of the Grand Prince's Bedchambers, originally built in the 16th century.

instance in Russia of the latter detail, which is characteristic of the European Renaissance (one of the best-known examples can be found at the Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow). After research and restoration of the interiors, the Italian masonry was carefully concealed behind panels faced with Italian tiles; the palace was also home to the Kremlin kitchens – a unique construction that remains closed to visitors.

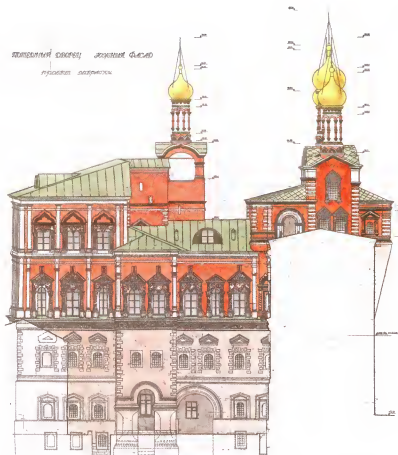
The Poteschny Palace

The most striking building re-opened in recent years is the Poteschny Palace, which is part of a sumptuous 17th-century palace complex. Until recently, few visitors to the Kremlin paid much attention to the tall but unremarkable building by the Trinity Gate. Today there rises up a dramatic and startling construction crowned by a whole cluster of gilded cupolas – the chambers, built around 1651, of the boyar Ilya Dmitrevich Miloslavsky, father-in-law of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov. After its owner's death in 1660, the palace passed to the treasury, and at the end of the 17th century it was home to tsarevnas and widowed tsaritsas. The palace gets its famous name from the performances that were staged here by the court theatre.*

The building consisted of an intricate set of two courtyards linked by a connecting arch. The four-storey palace was crowned by a many-cupolaed domestic church, with a hanging apple garden on the roofs of the buildings. In the 19th century, the building was twice restored; scholars could only guess at its original appearance. However, in the early 2000s, the Federal Protective Service (i.e., the presidential bodyguard), which occupies the building, finally signed agreements with restorers. And once more a commonplace Kremlin miracle occurred: research turned a diversity of opinions about Russian architecture upside down.

Among the discoveries were a sumptuous carved frieze on the façades – including both real and imaginary animals, a mermaid and an equestrian competition with riders wearing European clothes – the many-hued painting of the building and decorative and constructive elements that also had a clearly European origin. Miloslavsky is known to have visited Holland and Germany, so it is possible that he may have brought the craftsmen from there. The most

* The Russian adjective **потешный** derives from **потеха**, a form of popular entertainment.



Draft plan for reconstruction of the exterior of Poteschny Palace

important discoveries were made in the interiors of the palace; unfortunately these were not part of the restoration zone.

"These are virtually the only palace interiors from the second half of the 17th century to have survived," said Moscow Kremlin Museum deputy director Andrei Batalov. "The palace is a completely baroque construction. Some amazing things were discovered here – ornamental paintings on the walls and a unique coffered ceiling similar to the one discovered in the Bedchambers, only made out of white stone! If in the future the palace is turned into a museum, this would be a simply fabulous monument."

Patriarch's Palace

Investigation is continuing of the Patriarch's Palace, which forms the northern side of Cathedral Square. Construction of this complex began in 1450, but most of the surviving buildings were built in the mid-17th century. In the 19th century, however, the building was subjected to a stylized restoration, with the result that it was possible only to guess at which parts were authentic and which were born of the fertile imagination of 19th-century architects.

Recent research has been made possible by the removal of the public toilet that had been located for several decades in the enormous 'one-pillar chamber'

on the lower floor of the palace. (Finding a location for this essential tourist attraction has for some reason been extremely problematic. After the toilet was removed from the chamber, Cathedral Square was for some years decorated with a row of plastic outhouses. Now a more permanent facility – a formless plastic pavilion right in front of the Patriarch's Palace – has been erected.) Along the way, the building has been studied extremely thoroughly. The building's complex wooden structure has become clear. It was confirmed that part of the decoration of the northern elevation had been displaced in 1980 as part of the hurried preparation of the Kremlin for Olympics ceremonies. It was also discovered that the original 15th-century space – thought to have been lost by the 19th century at the latest – had been beautifully preserved until the 1960s, only to be taken down during the construction of the Palace of Congresses (it was mistakenly assumed to be a later addition).

Visually, the most striking discovery made by the restorers was a highly complex knot of staircases linking together several wings of the palace built at different times. This ornate agglomeration comprised of winding intramural staircases leading up and down, gloomy pantries, privies and cubbyholes for all sorts of domestic stuff. This knot made it possible to access any part of the building without going outside. At the start of the investigation, part of the premises was walled up and part cut off; in the 1960s it was planned to put in air-conditioning, but that idea was later dropped.

Investigation of the palace is still not finished; the next stage is the attic. It is not known what the original central section of the palace – between Patriarch Nikon's private quarters and the palace's church – was like. It is possible that the upper part of the Patriarch's Palace could have been similar to that of the Poteschny Palace, with its exposed cupping-room and bell-tower.

Cathedral of the Annunciation

The house church of the great princes, with its nine cupolas, was built in several stages from the time of the Battle of Kulikovo (1380) to the reign of Ivan the



Reconstruction of the knot of staircases in the Patriarch's Palace



Restoration of the facade of the Patriarch's Palace

Terrible (1533-1584). Explorations launched in 2000 have shed light on the earliest stages of the history of this remarkable building.

The ground floor built by Prince Dmitry Donskoy in the 14th century – the oldest surviving construction in the Kremlin – has been restored. Among the construction debris underneath the staircase were found fragments of decorative elements from a cathedral of 1416, most of which was destroyed during later reconstructions. Scholars have been able to partially piece together this broken mosaic and imagine the appearance of a building that disappeared more than 500 years ago. Among other finds were fragments of a fresco painted by the legendary icon-painter Andrei Rublyov. And since all works with a Rublyov connection are in a state of ruin, the fragments – untouched by alterations – that were discovered show the color-scheme that the painting had at the time of its creation.

But the most interesting discoveries were made in the cathedral's south porch, which in point of fact was a covered walkway to the palace of Ivan the Terrible. This highly unusual architecture shows signs of a European influence about which very little had previously been known; specifically, Andrei Batalov has shown the link between the white-stone carvings of the porch and Dutch book decorations from the middle of the 16th century.

"This is the only piece of court architecture that has survived from the time of Ivan the Terrible," said architect Georgy Yevdokimov. "From it we can see the highly ornate and complex structure of the lost ensemble; we have not worked it out fully yet, but we are trying. For example, the ancient appearance of the south porch, which at the time was still open to the elements, is becoming clear: the floors laid down in black and white triangular tiles, the red and white painted brickwork walls, the almost black vaulting and the white carving."

The Treasury Court

The porch of the Cathedral of the Annunciation simultaneously played the role of a formal entrance to the Treasury Court – the princely depository to the

east of the cathedral. The Treasury Court was built in the 1480s and demolished at the end of the 18th century. The Kremlin of today is as a whole only a memory of a formerly magnificent architectural ensemble. Half of it now is made up of squares and plazas, but in the Middle Ages there was only one square: Cathedral Square. All of today's well-crafted open spaces were built-up blocks crowded with churches, *boyars'* houses or monastery churches. One of the most sumptuous lost complexes was the Treasury Court. Thanks to the efforts of today's restorers, this edifice, which disappeared more than 200 years ago, is once again casting its shadow onto the walls of the cathedral. A closer look from Cathedral Square reveals the traces of abutting arches and staircases belonging to a non-existent building, as well as a carved column-head dating back to the time of Ivan the Terrible, embedded in the wall.

These are not the only remnants of the Treasury Court; underground is preserved the imposing cellar of another wing built in 1485. This is the oldest civilian construction in the Kremlin, but researchers gained access to it for the first time only at the end of the 1990s (moreover, the hidden cellar had not even been mentioned in specialist literature in the 20th century).

Interment of the Grand Princes in the Underground Palace of the Treasury Court



The cellar adjoins the Cathedral of the Archangel, which from the 14th to the 17th century was the resting place of the grand princes and subsequently the tsars. Russian tsaritsas were traditionally buried in the Kremlin's Monastery of the Ascension, which was destroyed in 1928. At the time, museum workers manually moved 40 tons of stone sarcophagi with the remains of the princesses to the Cathedral of the Archangel; having smashed the arches of the cellar, they lowered them down on ropes into the depths of the Treasury Court. Until recently the sarcophagi were strewn higgledy-piggledy along the wall of the basement, and only around the millennium was permission granted to restore the chamber (in the process another 15th-century walled-off room was discovered) and put the tombs there into good order.

Thanks to the efforts of the Kremlin's chief archaeologist, Tatyana Panova, the bones were sorted out and cleaned up, and many previously unidentified burials were finally identified. They included the remains of the only grand princess to have been canonized – Dmitry Donskoy's wife Yevdokia. At a ceremony in 2009, a reliquary containing her remains was transferred from the Underground Chamber to the sacristy of the Cathedral of the Archangel.

Archaeology of the Kremlin

Archaeological research into the Kremlin in the Soviet period was highly arbitrary. No planned digs were carried out, and experts were only allowed to inspect earthworks or building works that were being carried out. Work carried out in closed-off areas frequently went entirely unannounced.

At the start of the 1970s, the Kremlin acquired its own archaeological service, and the presence of experts at any digging work became more or less compulsory. But this was not observed on a regular basis. For example, in 1988, scholars were only alerted to secret construction works near the Petrovskaya Tower by trucks departing the site loaded with soil. However, in recent years archaeologists have finally been able to find a common language with the Kremlin authorities, and no less importantly with the workers who do the excavations. (A rusty piece of iron found by chance in a trench might before have been thrown onto the trash-heap; instead it was handed over to archaeologists for identification. It turned out to be a 12th-century sword bearing the insignia of the German armorer Tsitselin.)

Regardless of the numerous limitations imposed by the regimented use of the territory, over the course of the past 70 years a massive amount of evidence has accumulated in the archives regarding the internal configuration of Borovitsky Hill, as Kremlin Hill used to be known. This includes materials from archaeological digs and chance finds, as well as data

obtained from the drilling of boreholes. In all, some 1,100 reference points were established, a disorderly jumble of fragments of a broken mosaic.

Finally, the time came to make sense of the knowledge that had been accumulated. Some years ago, Panova defended her doctoral dissertation, in which she pieced together all of these shards into a single picture that significantly altered ideas about the ancient stages of Moscow's development. An important aspect was the reconstruction of the ancient contours and landscape of Borovitsky Hill. She was thereby able to unpick the history of the Kremlin fortifications, and to make another set of surprising discoveries.

The first traces of human settlement on the hill can be dated to the early Iron Age (just shy of 3,000 years ago). Remnants were found of two small settlements of the so-called Dyakovo culture. The best-preserved fragments – a small ditch and shards of pottery and burnt hearth-stones – were discovered right under the floor of the Cathedral of the Archangel. There is every reason to believe that this was a pagan holy site (it has been shown that even after the advent of Christianity the site remained undeveloped – a sacred grove grew here until the 14th century).

The first fortress appeared on Borovitsky Hill in the 12th century, with the arrival of the Kievan Prince Yuri Dolgoruky. It was a small, oval-shaped fortification with a single set of gates located not on the promontory of the hill, as is commonly thought, but on the site of the current Palace of Congresses, along the road from Vladimir to Smolensk, which crossed the hill. But the fortress was not a town in the proper sense; the citadel served as a resting place for the prince's troops (the detachment was apparently quite large and voracious – a pathway paved with bovine jawbones has been found alongside the Tsar Cannon). In 1156, Dolgoruky built a more impressive fortress out of pinewood to strengthen the road to Vladimir; two of its entrances were protected by defensive earthworks – fortifications before the town gates. (The Tsitselin sword was found in one of them, suggesting it was lost during an attempt to storm the town.) But this was still not a town, but rather a mustering point for troops. Thus, for all its broad spaces, inside the fortress was all but empty. In it were just three or four living blocks and the prince's court on the site of the current Presidential Residence by the Savior Gate (it was here, in the 1980s, that they found two celebrated hoards of princely treasure buried before the Mongol sack of Moscow in 1238).

At the start of the 14th century, Moscow could already confidently be called a town. In 1339, Ivan Kalita built a new wooden fortress to replace the old one, which had burned down, equipping it with two stockades to protect the gates. Reconstructing the

layout of the fortress appears much more difficult than previous speculative plans of the town's development, but in point of fact such difficulties are the norm for their time – the absence of specialized building techniques meant the contours of the town closely followed those of the landscape. The white stone Kremlin of Dmitry Donskoy was built on the foundations of this expanded fortification later, in 1367. Historians have argued for years over where these walls stood and what they looked like, while archaeologists at the same time have excavated a whole collection of fragments, buried in places as far down as five meters!

A number of interesting points have been cleared up regarding the 15th-century fortress that survives to the present day. For example, the ditch on Red Square; it turns out that it was made up of separate sectors divided by dykes in order to let the water out during the winter. There were also barrages to contain the Neglinka River, and the dammed river spilled over into a proper lake; the Alexander Garden was all under water, and above the Kutafey Tower it flooded almost the entirety of Manezhnaya Square. It is for this reason that no 16th-century stratum has been found on the square; it has been replaced by pond debris – a densely packed layer of dead tadpoles and other swamp rubbish.

"Today the Kremlin administration makes great efforts to keep us onside, as it is also interested in all of this," Panova said. "But they can only do so much. Only recently the commandant himself said: 'Let's try digging somewhere else.' I chose several spots that seemed interesting to me, and showed them to him – but nothing came of it. This spot was impossible, that spot had been impossible for years, while here the president travels to work every day. Organizing a research range in the Kremlin in the same way as in Ryazan or Kherson is, of course, out of the question; most work in the future will take the form of observations of individual locations. But we now have a much better idea of what we are looking for, and where to look for it."

The Lower Garden

In the summer of 2007, on the fringe of the Kremlin – the Lower Garden, running down the side of the hill towards the Moscow River – large-scale digs were undertaken for the first time; they revealed a beautifully preserved stratum dating from the 15th or 16th century. In the damp soil of the former floodplain, the domestic basements of a whole row of wooden houses had been preserved intact – the lower crown of the walls, the inter-storey coverings and staircases leading down from the first-floor premises, which were not preserved. In the underground section of one house a tub of pickled mushrooms was found.

In another basement they discovered seven charred bodies – a whole family that likely died in the fire of 1493. Paradoxical as it may sound, in Russia – which was a country of wooden towns right up until the 18th century – no wooden residences dating from the pre-Petrine era have survived above ground.

The reason for the works on the edge of the Kremlin was the construction of a technical edifice; in other words, the buildings that were discovered were doomed. Only one log structure was transferred to the



museum reserves; the remainder was bulldozed. The Kremlin has lots of places where thorough archaeology involving scraping around with trowels is not necessary, as everything has long since been dug up and moved elsewhere. But there are also places such as the fringe where nothing has been built for the past 200 years, and where the medieval stratum is preserved almost entirely untouched. It might seem that all this territory should be declared a reserve and turned into a gigantic museum complex. But as long as the Kremlin remains the seat of government, the appearance of such technical edifices is unavoidable, and the fringe will remain an extremely convenient place for this.

"If you take the position that the destruction of the buildings discovered is unacceptable, then clearly an alternative is needed," said archaeologist Igor Kondratyev. "Unfortunately, preserving the wooden constructions that have been liberated from the earth in the form that we see them in photographs is extremely difficult. Russia has no examples of turning archaeological fragments of wooden constructions into a museum *in situ*, and they are a rarity in Europe as well. So in this case the main question is as follows: is it worth excavating the fringe while we have no idea about how to preserve it? Eventually this idea will suggest itself – and the subterranean wilds of the Kremlin will have more than enough for those who want to turn them into a museum." RL

Excavation at the Lower Garden revealed beautifully preserved basements of a whole row of wooden houses. Just one of the buildings was preserved. The rest were bulldozed.

RUSSiAN Я RiGA

The history of Riga, capital of Latvia, has been intertwined with Russia for centuries. Russian settlers, accompanied by Orthodox priests, established themselves in the Baltics long before this city was founded in the ninth century, and during the 18th and 19th centuries, Riga was an important trading port for the Russian Empire. Later, under the Soviets, Riga developed as a center of industry, and the neighboring town of Jūrmala became a popular resort area. Today Riga is a thoroughly European city, whose ethnic Latvian residents are often eager to focus exclusively on the city's distinctly Latvian aspects. But traces of Riga's Russian past surround them.

In 1201, the German Bishop Albert established a fortress on the site of present-day Riga with the help of 24 ships of crusaders. They had been sent by the Pope to convert the pagans and/or to compete with the Orthodox priests already established there (sources differ). It was a battle that gave Albert no rest. In a letter to Pope Honorius III written over 20 years later, Albert expressed his concern that many of the newly-Catholicized Latvians were in danger of slipping back into Orthodoxy. As a result, many of the priests representing the rival church were banished from the city or killed.

Riga's picturesque old town on a late winter evening. The spire at left is St. Peter's Church, which dates to the 13th century.



By the mid-16th century, with its inhabitants fully subjugated and fully converted (willingly or unwillingly) to Catholicism, the bishops were firmly in control of this garrison town.

But the Russians couldn't stay away. Beginning in the 16th century, merchants especially were drawn to Riga, although only Germans were permitted to trade within the city limits. Forced to live and set up shop outside the city gates, these early Russian *biznesmeni* hawked their wares up and down the fittingly-named Moscow ("Maskavas") Street. The ramshackle encampment they built to live in, known as the Moscow Suburb, later welcomed Old Believers fleeing religious persecution in Russia. Throughout the 19th century, the Moscow Suburb buzzed with the sounds of old-fashioned Russian street life – the din of shops, restaurants, voices of cab drivers, the tolling of Orthodox church bells.

The Russian-style wooden buildings in this area are still a visual reminder of Riga's Slavic past, although Moscow Street was eventually renamed to honor a Latvian place instead of a Russian one (Latgales Street, after the southeastern region of Latvia). Even today, the Moscow Suburb remains a hub of commercial activity. Riga's Central Market is found here, but the surrounding neighborhood is grim and dilapidated. The unsavory characters who loiter there all know where to find hard liquor or a place to get high. The twentieth century, with its wars and decades of bland Soviet building projects, has taken its toll on the Moscow Suburb.

Latvia became part of the Russian Empire after it was wrested from Sweden during the Great Northern War (1700-1721).^{*} The siege of Riga lasted nine months, and included lethal bombings of the hapless populace from both sides. The Swedish missile, delivered in small wooden "bombs" that broke open upon impact, reminded

the people of Riga that they had been Swedish subjects for 90 years, and assured them that the current battle would end with a Russian defeat. In response, the Russian leaflet was a terse reminder of the Swedish rout at Poltava 12 years earlier, and included a promise of Russian victory. Even when a Russian takeover became inevitable, Riga did not surrender immediately, but held out for a series of political concessions from Peter the Great, known as the Capitulations of 1710. Riga received a promise of limited political autonomy, language rights, and even the right to use the Latvian system of weights and measures. In



the end, Peter the Great rejoiced, "at last the invincible bride has been taken!"

Riga remained part of the Russian Empire until the First World War, and this period is generally remembered as a time of peace and prosperity. The town outgrew its medieval boundaries and eventually became the third-largest industrial city in the Russian Empire (after St. Petersburg and Moscow). The Riga harbor provided work for thousands and, according to local historian and art expert Olga Dorofeyeva, the frenzy of construction at the turn of the nineteenth century has never been matched, even in the boom years before the current eco-

nomic crisis.

Riga retained a certain degree of municipal autonomy up until the 1870s, when the city government was dismantled and Russians took direct control. The Russification of the city can be said to date from that era: Russian became an official administrative language, alongside German. Like many Eastern European countries, Latvia was briefly an independent nation between World Wars I and II. And despite the country's newly-won sovereignty, two Russian-language daily papers were published during the interwar years, and Russians had voting rights in the Latvian Parliament (where one could make speeches in one's choice of Russian, German, or Latvian). Russians in Riga could also choose to send their children to a Russian-language high school. Riga – along with Paris, Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, and Brussels – attracted large numbers of Russian émigrés fleeing the turmoil in their homeland.

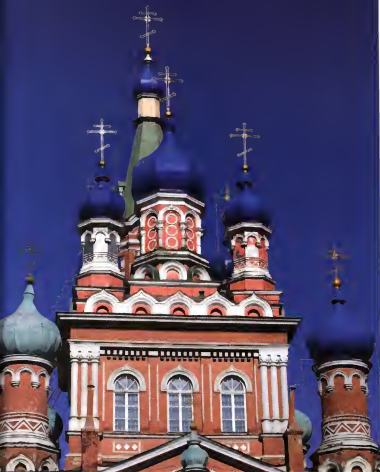
OBVIOUSLY, RUSSIA had a powerful influence on Riga while Latvia was part of the Soviet Union. This period, which began after World War II, is viewed disdainfully by most ethnic Latvians. But the legacy of the city's Soviet past is more nuanced than most of them would like to believe, and not all of Russia's contributions were uniformly negative.

"When I take tourist groups around the city and tell them about our 16-square-meter apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev and built in the 1950s," Dorofeyeva said, "foreigners always ask how anyone

RIGA VIEWS

Clockwise from top left: Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. Rifleman monument at the Latvian Museum of Occupation, with St. Peter's Church in the background. The Nativity of the Christ Orthodox Cathedral, which was turned into a planetarium in the Soviet era. Panorama of Riga as seen from the Daugava River. The narrow streets of the old town.

* Russia, in its quest for a Baltic port, allied itself with Denmark-Norway, Saxony, and Poland-Lithuania, and in 1700 attacked territories held by Sweden since 1621. The Russian defeat of Sweden at Poltava, Ukraine, in 1709, was a turning point in the war, and marked the beginning of Russia's development into a great European power. The phrase "like a Swede at Poltava" ("Как Шведы под Полтавой") became a colloquial expression signifying utter defeat.



could stand to live like that. But people had been living in basements and dormitories and dying of tuberculosis. That's how we finally got control of the disease, by moving people into these tiny apartments and out of much worse living conditions."

The Soviet government also helped to preserve some architectural treasures, spending over a million rubles on the restoration of

that built mopeds, bicycles, and buses. Modern Riga is now a city of consumers, not manufacturers.

Just as Soviet-era industry has vanished from Riga, so, too, have public tributes to Soviet leaders. The main street, formerly named for Lenin, is now Freedom ("Brīvības") Street. And where Lenin Street intersected with Kirov Street (now called Elizabeth Street), there once stood Latvia's largest statue of Lenin. No

to act as a testament to history, a purpose that is undermined if countries pull them down as soon as they become unpopular.

AFTER LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE in 1991, Riga began a rapid visual transformation. The Nativity of Christ Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in the Baltics (which the Soviets had turned into a planetarium), was reconverted to its original purpose. The cathedral had been built in 1874 with 900,000 rubles provided by Tsar Alexander II, and had survived two World Wars and the Russian Revolution, only to suffer its final desecration at the hands of the Soviet Minister of Culture Yekaterina Furtseva.

As the story goes, in 1963 Furtseva was in Riga attending a conference across the street from the cathedral, when she heard the church bells tolling. Apparently aghast, she ordered the bells and crucifixes removed within 24 hours. A proposal was then made to simply blow the church up, but opposition was too fierce. So the authorities converted it into a planetarium, complete with a basement café called The Ear of God. For the next 30 years, the people of Riga could, in a certain sense, continue to contemplate heaven in the old Orthodox cathedral, but now it cost five kopeks. It is rumored that Comrade Furtseva, who bore responsibility for the closure of so many churches, eventually succumbed to drink and killed herself.

The abbot of the Nativity of Christ Cathedral, Jēkabs Prīšažņuks, cited two more examples of the church's historical significance. Latvia's Orthodox Archbishop and first Orthodox saint, the future martyr St. Ivan (Ioan) of Riga, had a long history of involvement with this church. In the 1920s, he began living in the church's basement, hoping that his presence would help to defend the cathedral from a government takeover. Father Prīšažņuks also speaks of the miracu-



Signs in Cyrillic are illegal in Riga, thus even the names of Russian restaurants must be written in Latin letters.

Riga Cathedral (also known as Doma or the Dome Cathedral). The Lutheran cathedral was in poor condition when the government took it over in 1961, yet it still became a major tourist attraction. The "friendship trains" that carried citizens of one Eastern Bloc country to another, brought travelers to Riga to attend concerts in the renovated church or to listen to its famous pipe organ, one of the largest in the world, with 6,768 pipes.

Soviet Riga was also heavily industrialized, but today the largest factories are gone. Shopping centers have been built on the sites of plants that once produced armaments, radios, and telephones. The old rubber factory is gone, as are the plants

longer. In an all-night operation in 1991, a crane looped a cable noose around Vladimir Ilyich's bronze neck and ripped him from his pedestal. Before being taken away, Lenin circled the air in a final farewell to the jeering crowd. Photos of his degradation were seen around the world.

But not all ethnic Latvians were so eager to purge the city of every vestige of its Soviet past. Eric Stendzenieks, a local advertising executive, reminisced about the Lenin memorial that used to stand in the neighboring resort town of Jūrmala. "It was so huge inside," he recalled. "You could have built a café in there!" He pointed out that the purpose of public monuments is

lous healings that took place in the church in the presence of the ancient Tikhvin icon. Sheltered in Chicago during World War II, the icon was recently returned to Tikhvin Monastery (200 km east of St. Petersburg), and visited the Orthodox cathedral en route to its return.

The rest of Riga has also changed dramatically since 1991. The city's most prestigious neighborhood, a lovely, quiet Art Nouveau district in the city center, has been restored to its former glory. In Soviet times, the elegant homes here were carved up into warrens of cramped communal apartments. Yet artists and writers were drawn to the area's beautiful architecture. Dorofeyeva, like many residents, has a story to tell about the history of her former flat. "For years I had no idea that Mikhail Bulgakov's wife, Yelena, had lived in my apartment. But in fact, the character Voland from *The Master and Margarita* was actually named in honor of my street, Vīlandes Street. Even after I was forced to move out, that apartment stayed under my skin. I used to dream about it."

After independence, a frenzied and unregulated real estate speculation took hold of these few blocks east of the Daugava River, driving apartment prices to €3,000-5,000 per square meter. And prices have not declined, even during the current economic crisis.

MANY OF THE LANDMARK institutions in Riga from Soviet times have not survived in the new Latvia. New Italian and Japanese restaurants have replaced many of the eateries that used to serve traditional Latvian dishes. The Vētrga pastry shop, beloved by both city residents and visitors, no longer exists in the Old City. The Cafe Kristīne is also gone. Dorofeyeva laughs, "When I show tourists around the Old City, all you can smell now is Ukrainian *borsch*. Today's Riga has several different personalities: Soviet architecture on the outskirts, a slickly modern

downtown, and an Old City with medieval charm."

There is a clear divide between the Latvian and Russian areas of the city. Each has its own traditional shops, restaurants, and recreation spots. Of the 800,000 Riga residents, 44% are ethnically Russian and 58% speak Russian. But the visibly Russian part of Riga is shrinking. Vyacheslav Altukhov is the president of the Russian Society of

an exam on Latvian language and history.

Altukhov was originally sent to work in Riga after graduating from college in Bryansk (southwest of Moscow). At the time, Soviet authorities were rather selective about who was allowed to move to the Baltics. They wanted to be sure that any Russians living there would be on their best behavior. Altukhov, an amateur artist, had been an excel-

"There was no greater shock to people than when, in the early 1990's, they declared that Latvian was the singular official language, and even ethnic Latvians did not speak it very well."



Vyacheslav Altukhov

Latvia. With 7,700 members, it is the largest organization of Russians in the country. The society sponsors lavish annual folk music festivals, a carnival, and Christmas parties. They publish pamphlets about history and Russian traditions, and offer several folklore clubs.

According to Altukhov, the country's political climate and the new citizenship laws have caused nearly half a million people to leave the country.

"There was no greater shock to people than when, in the early 1990s, they declared that Latvian was the singular official language," Dorofeyeva said, "and even ethnic Latvians did not speak it very well."

In other former Soviet republics, longtime residents automatically received citizenship in the newly-formed countries. But Latvia was different. Despite having lived in Latvia since the late 1970s, Altukhov only became a naturalized Latvian citizen ten years ago, after a complicated process that included passing

an exam on Latvian language and history. Altukhov was originally sent to work in Riga after graduating from college in Bryansk (southwest of Moscow). At the time, Soviet authorities were rather selective about who was allowed to move to the Baltics. They wanted to be sure that any Russians living there would be on their best behavior. Altukhov, an amateur artist, had been an excellent student, and had demonstrated the exemplary lifestyle and character required. He moved to Riga, got married, and lived half his life there. He therefore bristles at the idea that Russians in Latvia could be seen as occupiers. "I haven't occupied anyone. I was invited to come here. I am a Latvian citizen and want only the best for my country. The Russian Society of Latvia is fighting for equal rights and bilingualism. Russians in Latvia are willing to integrate but not to assimilate. In the last 10 years, 128 Russian schools have been shut down, and those children have been forced to go to Latvian schools. We now have to arrange for Russian classes on Sundays so those children can learn to read and write in Russian."

Eduard Govorushko is an experienced Russian journalist and is currently the U.S. correspondent for *Subbota*, a Russian-language weekly based in Latvia. "I don't want to say anything that will offend the passionate defenders of the Russian

language. But their fury to preserve it is hurting their own cause. The carrot is always more effective than the stick.* Back in Soviet times, if you knew both languages, you got paid more. Their hostility toward the Russian language has resulted in a generation of young Latvians who can't speak it, and thus have a harder time finding a job."

In this city where half the inhabitants speak Russian, there is scarcely a single Russian sign on the street.

AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, something rather extraordinary happened last year. In July, for the first time in the city's history, Riga elected a Russian mayor. This despite the fact that 360,000 Latvian residents, many of them Russian, lack the legal citizenship required to vote. The new mayor, 33-year-old Nil Ushakov, campaigned for the rights of Russian speakers in Latvia. It was, however, universally acknowledged that Latvians were not voting for Ushakov as much as they were voting *against* his opponents, who had proven themselves inept at handling Latvia's economic difficulties. (In recent years Latvia has suffered the worst economic decline in Europe.) The Russian news media greeted Ushakov's victory with a headline hearkening to Peter the Great's victory in 1710: "The Russians have finally taken Riga!"

Ushakov is, not surprisingly, quite popular in Russia, which has been highly critical of Latvia's treatment of its Russian-speaking residents. But in 2009, along with Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, and Metropolitan Kirill (Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church), Nil Ushakov was named Russia's Man of the Year (awarded by the Russian Biographical Institute). Specifically, Ushakov was honored for "reducing conflict between social groups." But despite the high hopes placed in him by Latvian Russians, Ushakov has so far made no striking changes to the laws that govern citizenship

requirements or that address the establishment of Russian-language schools.

Still, many ethnic Latvian politicians, like Riga's deputy mayor, Ainars Slesers, are beginning to speak of the need to improve the lives of Latvian Russians and to cultivate a more pragmatic political relationship with Russia. "Latvia is home to people of many different nationalities. I am in favor of having a good working relationship with Russia, and if people don't like that, that's their problem," Slesers said. "We have to become a strategic center between the East and West, or else languish as an eastern EU backwater. Right now, when everyone is looking for a way out of the economic crisis, why can't we make Riga a more attractive place for Russian citizens to open offices or expand their businesses? Why should we sit back and watch them pour their money into Switzerland and buy real estate in London?"

THE RIGA RUSSIAN DRAMA THEATER is the oldest professional theater in Latvia, recently celebrating its 125th birthday. A hundred years ago, it was one of the best provincial theaters in the Russian Empire. Today its repertoire is unusually extensive, ranging from the classics of Shakespeare, Moliere, and Chekhov, to modern, innovative productions.

Many famous Russians have lived and worked in Riga, such as writer Ivan Krylov, who wrote his famous Russian fables in a local castle, and Vladimir Vysotsky, the legendary actor and musician, who filmed movies here. Vysotsky spent 15 years acting, filming, writing, performing music, and vacationing with his family in Riga.

Olga Neginova was a friend of Vysotsky's who has started a club, Planet Vysotsky, to immortalize the Russian bard and actor. (Vysotsky died at 42, but would have turned 70 in 2008.) It sponsors literary readings, concerts, school programs, and

exhibits, and its members have begun to push for a Vysotsky museum in Riga. The club has collected all kinds of materials relating to his life, including magazine articles written about him during his lifetime, and photographs from a concert he held at a local school, as well as pictures from a nearby resort where he shot the movie *Chetyorty* (*The Fourth*).

"Once I called Vysotsky because I needed his help to get my son tickets to the Taganka Theater in Moscow," Neginova remembered. "He just said, 'Oh, Olga, of course! After all, I still owe you for that fabulous borsch you fed me.' I knew him back when he was healthy, not drinking, when he was in love and writing three or four songs every night. He used to play his music for his wife Marina as soon as he wrote it."

MANY RUSSIANS WHO HAVE lived in Riga at some point and then moved abroad continue to think of Riga as their hometown. A Russian town. Journalist Eduard Gommorah regularly commutes between Boston and Riga. His family moved to Boston when his daughter married an American, so in 2000 he decided to retire and burn his bridges. He sold his apartment and *dacha*, threw himself a farewell dinner, and left Riga. But only a year later, he returned to his beloved city. His family is in one city, but his heart is in the other. He has traveled half the world, living and working in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Minsk, Vladivostok, Budapest, Sofia, Warsaw, Paris, and Boston. But his homesickness for Riga never leaves him.

"There's just something special in the air here," he said. "The people who built this town must have sensed it, too. Life here feels musical and for me, Riga's soundtrack is the music of Raimonds Pauls, the Latvian piano player and jazz composer. I think he has done more to promote the image of Riga than

anyone else. I remember once being in Soviet Hungary, and having a hard time trying to explain to people there what kind of a place Latvia was. But as soon as I mentioned Raimonds Pauls, the Hungarians immediately started nodding and saying, "Oh yes, he does that song *A Million Scarlet Roses*!"

gomorrah loves just walking around the city and hearing people speak Russian.

"I always miss hearing Russian when I'm in Boston. But the Russians in Riga are different than Russians in Russia. We're more reserved; you don't see people yelling at each other on the street. We're more refined and courteous. And since we're all originally from the USSR, we still have that sense that we're all in this together. You just don't get that feeling very often in the West."

The first place gomorrah heads for when he gets to Riga is always the Kolotilovka bathhouse. He claims they have the best steam in the world and the most delicious food: pickles and tomatoes, vodka with horseradish, and fish soup. A good steam and a brisk thrashing with birch twigs in this authentic Russian bathhouse is, he said, better than anything in this world, except, maybe, for a stroll along the beach in Jūrmala.

JŪRMALA, LATVIA'S summer capital, is definitely worth its own visit. Just 30 kilometers from Riga, it has 32 kilometers of golden beaches and romantic, turn-of-the-century wooden cottages. It used to be famous throughout the USSR as a mineral bath spa with health resorts, restaurants, and original, live entertainment. The old restaurants from Soviet days, like Jūras Pērle, Cabourg, Uzbekiston, and U Samovara, as well as Aero, the first Soviet grill-style restaurant, used to make a huge impression on visitors. Jūrmala was seen as a little piece of the West inside the USSR. A whole team of famous chefs was

responsible for designing the menu at Jūras Pērle.

"Do you know why waiters in Jūrmala always seemed so different compared to ordinary waiters?" asked Ilya Dimenshteyn, a journalist, historian, and author of the book *Our Jūrmala*. "They had choreographers from the Opera and Ballet Theater who came in to work with them. Those waiters were specially trained how to walk, how to act, and how to do things with a certain style."

In Jūrmala today, Ilya finds himself nostalgic for the sound of children's voices and the Pioneer camps' bugles sounding reveille in the mornings. He misses all the ordinary people — soldiers, miners, teachers, and writers — who used to visit the health spas year-round, making the place feel alive even in the off-season. But where Pioneer camps once stretched along the coast, today you find mansions built for the wealthy, frequently Russian businessmen and celebrities. Music stars like Filipp Kirkorov and Valeriy Meladze, and socialites like Kseniya Sobchak, have all bought property in Jūrmala.

In fact, in the summertime, Jūrmala turns into a Russian Miami. It is hard to believe that just

100 years ago there were very strict rules here about public behavior. Swimming was segregated: men until 10 A.M. and then women only from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. Today people get dressed up and stroll along the main drag, Jomas Street, listening to music spilling out of bars. At night there are discos on the beach, and almost every day there is some kind of Russian festival going on, like Jūrmalina, the big comedy festival, or KVN, the comedy and music competition. Russian entertainers are always sure to include Jūrmala on their tours. Without question the noisiest event is the New Wave festival, which every July brings in young performers from all over the world.

If you're in Jūrmala during New Wave, you might run into the actor and comedian Gennady Khazanov strolling on the beach with his family; or you might find the singer Filipp Kirkorov sitting at the table next to you at the Slāvu restaurant on Jomas Street; or you might discover that last parking spot being taken by a custom-made Jeep with a license plate reading, "Timati," which happens to belong to the wildly famous Russian rap star.

The intertwining of Russia and Latvia knows no bounds. **RL**

The wide, flat beach at Jūrmala, Latvia's summer capital.



At Lunch, by Zinaida Serebriakova



Lunch in Ages Past

ZINAIDA SEREBRIAKOVA'S beautiful painting *At Lunch* captures a world that was soon to disappear in Russia. Painted in 1914, this intimate portrait depicts three of Serebriakova's four children — Zhenya, Sasha, and Tanya — as they are about to enjoy their midday meal. Serebriakova's devotion to realism is striking in the context of 1914, a year defined by extraordinary artistic experimentation: Kazimir Malevich was working on his radically abstract Suprematist canvases, Vladimir Tatlin was creating non-objective Constructivist reliefs, and Liubov Popova was

painting Cubo-Futurist cityscapes. By contrast, Serebriakova belonged to the Union of Russian Artists, a group representing the second-generation World of Art movement, whose founders included her uncle Aleksandr Benois and her brother Evgeny Lansere. Thus her adherence to the principles of realism is hardly surprising.

Although Serebriakova endows her children with classical features, *At Lunch* nevertheless evinces a warm domesticity and a palpable maternal love. The artistic details are perfect, down to the lace of Tanya's

pinafore, the booster seat upon which she perches, the wooden trivet the hot tureen rests on, and the floral pattern of the porcelain. The painting's overall blue and white palette is enhanced by the lustrous golden highlights of the pitcher, the rolls, the soup, and the napkin ring, subtly evoking the famous "gold in azure" of Russian Orthodox cathedrals.

The title of the painting, *Za zavrtrakom*, reveals a different conception of mealtimes in Russia. First-year students of Russian learn that the word *zavtrak* means "breakfast,"

Although Serebriakova endows her children with classical features, *At Lunch* nevertheless evinces a warm domesticity and a palpable maternal love.

while *obed* ("dinner") is used for the large, midday meal — a meal that always includes soup. At suppertime the lighter *uzhin* is served. But in the past, the word *zavtrak* carried a couple of different meanings. *Malenky zavtrak*, or "little breakfast," referred to an early-morning meal consisting of light, simple fare taken before the morning chores. It was only later in the day, usually between eleven and twelve, that a more substantial meal was prepared for the "second" (*vtoroy*) breakfast, such as the one depicted in Serebriakova's painting.

The painting's precision immediately reveals this table as belonging to an affluent, westernized family. The soup at the center of the composition is being served from a silver ladle by the hand of a servant. Tellingly, even as the children are portrayed with arresting beauty, the servant remains anonymous, her hand disembodied as her black dress merges with the background. The table is set with a fine white cloth and matching napkins in rings. A crystal carafe of water shimmers as if suffused with light. Pride of place is given to crusty white *bulki*, or rolls, made from the finest wheat flour in the French manner. The soup itself

is not a thick peasant soup but a clear, golden broth, likely a chicken or veal consommé. And yet there are some homey touches. The bright yellow pitcher for milk stands next to chunky slices of dark Russian rye bread. And a classic earthenware *gorshok* or pot in front of the carafe possibly holds sour cream.

Serebriakova invites us into her home, to share in this peaceful moment of the day. But her domestic bliss was cut short all too soon. In 1919 her husband died of typhus. The family estate in Ukraine was plundered in the post-Revolutionary turmoil, and Serebriakova was left destitute. Because no oil paints were available, she worked in charcoal and pencil. In 1924 she was offered a commission in Paris. Serebriakova left the Soviet Union with every intention of returning, but she ultimately remained in France, eventually bringing her children Sasha and Katya to join her; Zhenya and Tanya, two of the children depicted here, remained behind. Had Serebriakova not captured this moment in such elegant detail, the era of leisurely lunches so elegantly served would seem even more like a dream of the past.

Raisin Buns



These soft, sweet buns are perfect for an early morning breakfast or late afternoon tea. If you're pressed for time, after shaping them you can hold them in the refrigerator overnight to bake fresh in the morning.

- 1 package active dry yeast
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup warm water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- 2 eggs, well beaten, at room temperature
- $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour

Filling

- 8 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light cream
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups seedless raisins

- 2 tablespoons melted butter

Dissolve the yeast in the warm water. Mix the sugar, salt and butter in a large mixing bowl. Heat the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cream to just below the boiling point, then pour it over the mixture, stirring until the butter melts. Cool to lukewarm. Stir in the yeast, lemon rind, eggs and enough flour to make a soft dough. Cover the bowl and chill the dough in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 hours, until it is workable (it may be held overnight).

To make the filling, beat the cream cheese until smooth. Stir in the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cream, mixing well. Beat out any lumps, then stir in the raisins.

Grease a large baking sheet. Roll the dough out $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick on a floured board. Cut it into 24 squares. Place a heaping tablespoon of the cream cheese filling in the center of each square. Bring the edges together in the center and pinch to seal. Place the buns on the baking sheet seam side down and brush them with the melted butter. Let rise, covered, until doubled in bulk, 35 to 40 minutes.

Bake the buns at 400° F for 12 minutes, until lightly browned. These buns are best when still slightly warm.

Makes 2 dozen.

Adapted from *A Taste of Russia*



THE LINE

By Olga Grushina
(Putnam, April 2010), \$25.95

Olga Grushina's second novel is a masterpiece of storytelling. She transports us to what seems Soviet Russia of the 1950s, or a few decades after "the Change." News is leaked that an émigré composer will be returning for a single, special engagement concert (a literary riff on Igor Stravinsky's 1962 return). And a ticket line forms in which people wait through an entire year, slowly forming a community of hopeful sojourners, their lives, secrets and passions intertwining as the experience of expectation leads to unexpected revelations.

Aside from the wonderful plot and deeply drawn characters, there is a richness in Grushina's writing that contains all the senses. We feel the damp cold of her winter evenings, smell the thick soup reducing in the close kitchen, hear the murmur of passing conversations, see the church shadows falling on her characters, taste the crumbly canapés at a secure embassy party. This is a novel to be read slowly, her descriptive power savored: "the low, furry-clawed sounds resumed shuffling up and down invisible stairs like clumsy circus bears..."; "the strengthening wind began to throw heavy hours back and forth like smudged, icy snowballs..."

In the end, the line draws the characters out of themselves. It has, as one of the

protagonists reflects, taken them apart, piece by piece, "then put them back together again; but the order of the pieces was subtly different, or else they fit together in a different, looser way, with spaces left between them for air, or light, or music, or perhaps something else altogether, something ineffable that made him feel more alive."

Exactly what a good novel should do for a reader.



2017

By Olga Slavnikova
(Overlook, March 2010), \$26.95

Krylov is a young and extremely talented gem cutter who is obsessed by transparency, with the luminous quality of rubies and other precious stones. He is also obsessed by the mysterious Tanya, with whom he has a prolonged, bizarre affair founded on exceptional uncertainties, and who – he fantasizes – will help him (as soon as he has enough money) escape the prison that is his life.

But this is the centenary of the October Revolution, and reality and fantasy, past and future, hopes and hazards, are getting hard to separate. This is a Russia of

the future, where the country's harsh realities, ecological disasters and criminality have become amplified with time. Krylov, who just wants to slough off his violent, criminal exoskeleton, finds instead that his life is getting increasingly complicated, that the noose is tightening and there may be no way out.

2017 is a novel of ideas in the tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, yet set in the mineral- and myth-rich Urals. Slavnikova's prose is dauntingly dense in the first third of the novel, and it is difficult to slog through her layering of back stories, but the payoff is well worth it. Marian Schwartz's translation is opulent and lucid, belying the countless linguistic knots she had to unravel in order to birth this dense Booker-winning novel into English. In short, a gem.

CONSPIRATOR

By Helen Rappaport
(Basic Books, March 2010), \$27.95

The period of Lenin's life when he wandered Europe, impoverished and isolated, prior to the 1917 revolution is recounted in fascinating detail in this new book by the author of *The Last Days of the Romanovs*.

One might think it tells us little to learn how Lenin disliked British food (but loved the buttered muffins), how he and Trotsky attended and participated in public debates in London, or how Lenin bullied fellow expat revolutionaries, but personalities drive history and Lenin had a monstrously huge one. This volume contributes immensely to our understanding of how Lenin forged his cadre, his leadership style and the worldview that all came to be so brutally reflected in the oppressive state he founded.

PURCHASE INFORMATION: Russian Life does not sell the items reviewed in this column. To purchase any of these items, visit our website's Book Reviews section for quick and easy links to purchase online.

ONLINE LANGUAGE STUDY

There are plenty of desktop or audio-based programs for Russian language study, the best known being Rosetta Stone and Pimsleur, respectively. But we wanted to look at online-only tools for Russian language study, sites that use the principles of Web 2.0 and social networking to make the learning process more effective and meaningful. Below are brief reviews of what we found. Of course, we have likely only grazed the surface, and welcome readers to provide input and share experience via our blog.

wordchamp.com

This site has lots of flashcard sets you can access, plus a nice audio implementation; it seems to be used by lots of teachers. You can create your own flashcard sets and work through them, and can also connect up with language tutors. Different paid membership plans, starting at \$9.95.

LingQ.com (pronounced "link")

Several levels of membership, from free to \$79/month. Learn vocabulary online or by downloading audio files (everything from radio talk shows to short stories) to your iPod. There are online lessons and you can arrange writing consultations with tutors via Skype, or join in live conversations.

Quia.com (pronounced "key-ah")

Like LingQ, this is a cross pollination of social networks and language learning, with the ability to find teachers, interact with activities and quizzes, and use online exercises to improve your language skills. Intended largely as a supplement to classroom courses, it can nonetheless be used by individuals.

Livemocha.com

Probably the best-known of the sites we visited, this nice service integrates friends and an online community with learning resources, language skill tests, and interactive flashcards. Users help one another and there are tools for beginners through intermediate level.

TeachRussian.org

Mainly an online resource center for Russian language teachers, it nonetheless is full of useful reference materials for students. Loads of free exercises you can download and work through. (Disclosure: This site is run by the folks who helped us compile our *Uchites* insert.)

Lingro.com

A very cool glossed reading tool that lets you use the web to learn to read Russian better. Enter a Russian website address (like a news site) while at the lingro.com site, and indicate that you want to translate from Russian to English. The page loads (in Russian) and then you can click on any unknown word on the page and up pops a dictionary balloon.

Podcasts would seem an area ripe for good audio learning tools. But so far the choices are rather limited. Two beginner level podcasts for Russian language learn-


ing can be found on iTunes. Both are free. *A Spoonful of Russian*, and *RussiaPod101* are both rather basic, but a good place to start.

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Memories of Perestroika

THIS YEAR MAKES 25 since Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on his brave—and ultimately hopeless—attempt to rescue the Soviet system. The following are random memories of an ordinary visitor during those years.

¶ The sudden death of my favorite morning routine—ice-cream with champagne at the Lyagushatik café on Nevsky Prospect. Orange punch was a lousy alternative.

¶ Vehement and wildly incoherent street debates on the new “Speakers’ Corner” outside the *Moskovskiy Novosti* offices, where, to a Westerner, violence seemed imminent but, these being Russians, never happened. Though I did once flee, pursued by an acid-faced female pensioner-terrorist screaming “Trotskist!”

¶ In 1987, in a Leningrad kitchen, listening to the BBC... un-jammed.

¶ Long arguments with liberal stalwarts, especially Irina Osipova and Lev Razgon, about the obligations of the newly-liberated Russian *intelligentsia*. Party politics was anathema! Russian idealism and maximalism (irredeemably noble and frustrating to a Western sympathizer) scorned the practical politics of deal and compromise. The *intelligentsia* would thunder from the sidelines in its historic role as conscience of the nation. But from about 1987 there was a radical shift in kitchen-table visions. Memorial was founded as a human rights “conscience,” an educator of the

people. But it rapidly accepted evolution into a single-issue pressure group and finally embraced despised party politics, entering the Inter-regional Group (later DemRossiya) in the elected Congress of 1989. Razgon, who was always more pragmatic, became Memorial president. But I always felt that the maximalist instinct would inhibit liberals like Yavlinsky and Afanasyev in a politics in which old CPSU street fighters (like Yeltsin) were far more adept.

¶ Watching a sour-faced Yuri Solovyov, Leningrad Party boss, demonstrating his conversion to democracy by abandoning his usual airy wave from the Winter Palace podium to march (flanked by bodyguards) in parade with the common people (in the unprecedentedly free elections of 1989, his was the only name on the ballot, but he still lost).

¶ Joining a joyful crowd breaking through bewildered police lines into a sealed-off Red Square, with our leader brandishing the newly minted credentials of an elected “Narodny Deputat” (People’s Deputy). One of the delights of *perestroika* was the worried perplexity of the guardians of the law, previously so confident in their disregard of it.

¶ An emotional first visit to the memorial to the victims of the Soviet regime, a rough block of granite from the prison islands of Solovki, set on a tree-clad traffic island directly confronting KGB

headquarters in the Lubyanka and dedicated in an immensely moving ceremony in October 1990.

But the old ways don’t die easily. In 1961 I saw Stalin lying in the mausoleum next to Lenin and hoped his later eviction [October 31 that year] and humbler burial heralded great change. But during *perestroika*, flowers multiplied upon his grave. So I have less pleasant memories of the Gorbachev years.

¶ Marching in the 1986 May Day parade in refreshing showers of radioactive rain from the five-day-old Chernobyl disaster of which we were blissfully uninformed (Gorbachev finally confessed to the nation on May 14).

¶ An evening in January 1991, when Lev Razgon’s wife Rika burst in on us, shouting “You sit here drinking coffee, while they are murdering people in Vilnius.”

¶ Out of Russia, helplessly watching British TV in August 1991. Nobody was confident that “we can’t go back.” We had panicked in March 1988 when Ligachev (in Gorbachev’s absence) gave Nina Andreyeva’s “Back to Bolshevism” letter full publicity and official approval. Now there was panic again and friends in Moscow were desperately trying to disperse the priceless Memorial archive to safe hiding places. Again it came out all right, but this time *perestroika* was over and what followed is a different history.

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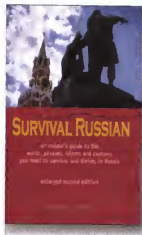
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The Hermitage (the green building in the background) put its foot down and raised entrance fees for foreigners, widening the gap from what is charged for Russian visitors.

Hermitage R

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officials held several containers of fish from Asia for several hours, citing incomplete documentation, most of the fish died in the heat. More recently, Sochi customs has not allowed in two leopards brought from Turkmenistan as a gift for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The

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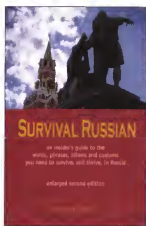
Do you know where the crayfish winter? (page 80)

Would you like someone to do you a bear's favor? (page 100)

Is it good to look like a cucumber? (page 10)

...or a radish? (page 85)

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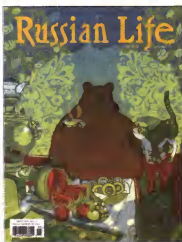
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